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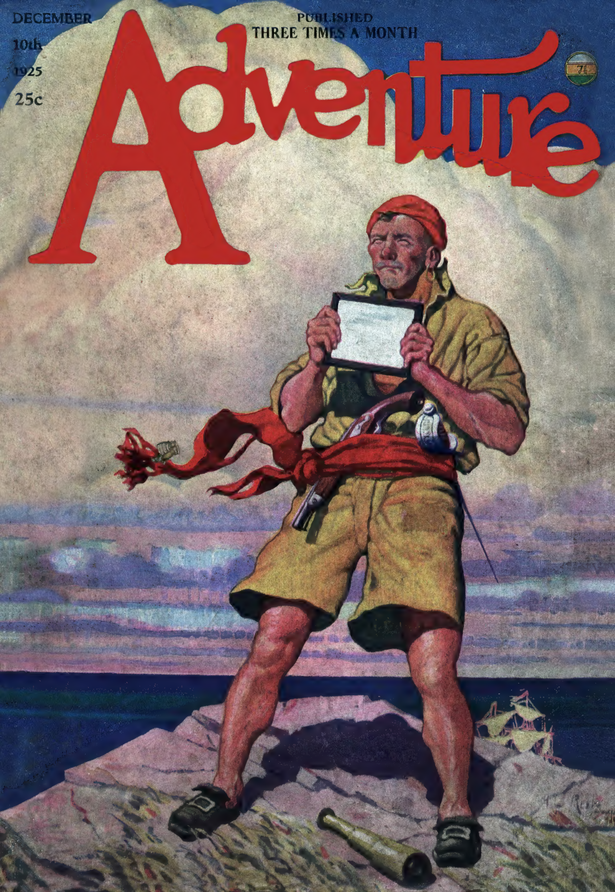

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Dec. 10th. 1925 Vol. LVI No. I

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Headings . . . . **A. Schweider**

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A New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

WHEN the colonel was promoted to the rank of brigadier general he made a liberal offer. He promised that the first doughboy to capture a prisoner should be his orderly on his trip back to the United States. You should have seen the men struggle for the place! "THE EXPENSIVE PRISONER," a complete novelette by Leonard H. Nason, will appear in the next issue.

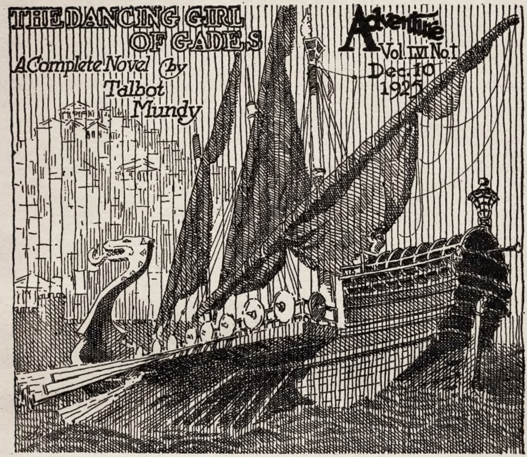
GAVIN McLEAN and *Jim Budd* had different ideas of adventuring. *McLean* played the bagpipes to persuade the natives he was a god and *Budd* took more civilized steps to convince the English governor he was a square, American business man. "ROVERS THREE," a new serial by J. Allan Dunn, will begin in the next issue.

THERE was an essential weakness about his mouth; this was when he was sober. Once when he was drunk he contracted to turn a mob of peons into soldiers. Before he had finished with them things happened to him and to them. "GENERALISSIMO" is a complete novelette, by David R. Sparks, in the next issue.

IN THE early days of Nevada a lot was taken for granted. But when *Larry McCall's* best friend, *Ben Jackson*, turned sour against him, his outlook changed and he began to think he had acted rashly in adopting the orphan children. "A FRIEND FROM TOPHET," a complete novelette by E. S. Pladwell, will appear in the nest issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



THE DANCING GIRL OF GADES

A Complete Novel by

Talbot Mundy

Adventure
Vol. LVI No. 1
Dec. 10
1925

Author of "Tros of Samothrace," "The Enemy of Rome," etc.

CHAPTER I

B.C. 54. OFF THE COAST OF BRITAIN.

"ABOVE the silver bosom of the sea hung wisps of pearly mist, and through them gleamed the Vectis.* Tros' great ship, the *Liafail*, swayed leisurely at anchor, her vermilion top-sides and her three spars mirrored in the lazy swell. Gulls circling around her cried of far horizons, drowning out the drone of voices from between decks where the oarsmen sprawled at ease.

On the poop lolled Sigurdsen, bronze-bearded son of Odin, with gray eyes that could see the wind and shoulders hefty from the swing of battle-ax and target; giant, capable of gloom more mystic than the darkness of a Baltic winter's night, but just now singing to himself of the slaying of Herald the son of Skram because, what with spring sunshine and a full crew, he felt almost at peace with himself.

On the bow, where the great gold serpent rose above the figurehead and flashed its bronze tongue like a living thing to every movement of the ship, sat Conops—Greek, undersized and uglier than knotted tree-roots, with a red cap pulled down over a sightless eye. He was whittling a stick the while he kept the anchor watch, with three Britons and three Spaniards eyeing every movement of the long knife, for he was crafty at the whittling. He sang of the Levant where green grapes ripened in the sun and red-lipped women waited at the quays for mariners.

A dozen Spaniards and a dozen Northmen lolled about the deck, trying to make conversation in a bastard Gaulish that was strange to all of them, but all the speech they had in common. Theirs was the air of seamen, to whom nothing on the sea was

---

*The modern Isle of Wight.

"*The Dancing Girl of Gades*," *copyright, 1925, by Talbot Mundy.*

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unexpected except idleness, and idleness the only luxury they knew. But they were well clothed in wool and leather, well fed and as plainly well pleased with their lot as they were capable and fierce. No stranger would have chosen them to pick a quarrel with just for the fun of asserting himself.

The upper deck was as clean and tidy as sand-scrubbing and strict discipline could make it. Ropes were coiled; the arrow engines were covered with pitch-soaked linen, 'paulin; neatly laid along both bulwarks were the blankets of the crew, and from below deck, mixed with the drone of voices, came the sound of scrubbing and the smell of lye. Whenever a man spat he did it overside or else spent two hours with sand, scrubbing-stone and bucket cleaning up the mess.

In the stateroom under the poop, against a solid table leaned Tros, the designer, builder, master of the ship. He wore his purple cloak for the occasion, and from his jeweled belt his long sword hung in a vermilion scabbard. Great, glowing amber eyes challenged destiny from under the band of gold that crossed his forehead, and his hair hung in heavy black coils to his shoulders, increasing his natural dignity. He had shaven himself in deference to British custom, and the crushing obstinacy of his jaw and chin, the oak-strength of his neck and the humorous, tolerant, masterful lines of mouth and nostril were exposed for whoso would to read. One would oppose him at one's own risk, but he looked likely to be generous in victory.

"We will see," he remarked, and the three words told his character.

A Druid, brown streaks in his white beard, robed in white and with the golden sickle of office in his girdle, leaned forward from a seat beside the door, mildly rebuking:

"You will see too much for anybody's good. You are like a bull that breaks the fences down. Because you have been told the world is round—"

Tros interrupted, laughing, showing strong white teeth:

"My father was taught such mysteries, but I took no oath of Samothrace as he did. What I know is knowledge from within myself. I will prove the world is round. I will sail around it."

"Let that be at your own risk," the Druid answered. "We have trusted you. In Britain you have built your ship with Britons' aid, of British oak and sheathed with British tin. Her sails and her ropes are of British flax. Your slaves, more than half of her crew, are all Britons whom the King Caswallon gave to you."

"The Lord Tros earned them," said Caswallon, gesturing with a blue-stained, white, enormous hand.

It irritated him especially just then to hear his friend Tros lectured, but Tros smiled and their eyes met. Those two understood each other far better than either of them understood the Druid.

"We gave you pearls out of our treasure," said the Druid. "Those were for a purpose."

"Aye," Tros answered, leaning back against the table, squeezing the edge of it in both hands until knuckles and muscles stood out in knots. A sort of thrifty look was in his eyes now. "A man can not keep such a ship as mine on nothing. Wind blows us, but the men eat meat. There is more wear and tear to pay for than a landsman thinks. I will make a profit, but I will not forget to serve you in the making."

"Not if you turn aside to prove what you have no business to know," the Druid answered. "Whether the world is round or flat—and mark you, on that I am silent—your friends, to whom you are beholden, are in peril."

Caswallon snorted like a war-horse, but his wife Fflur laid a jeweled hand on him and, with her dark gray eyes, begged silence.

"When I forget my friends, may all the gods forget me," Tros said solemnly, frowning, not liking that his promise should be called in question. "I itch, I ache, I yearn to prove the world is round. But I know better than to fare forth on that quest and leave promises unkept behind me. Not while Cæsar is free to invade Britain will I reckon myself free to spread sail straight toward the setting sun. In Rome, as I have told you half a hundred times, are Cæsar's enemies, his friends and all the riff-raff who will take whichever side is uppermost. One way or another I will break the spokes of Cæsar's wheel before I set forth on my own adventure. And if I fail in Rome, I will come back to Britain and help you."

Fflur shook her head.

"You will never return," she remarked. "That is why I wish Orwic were not sailing with you."

Orwic laughed. He was Caswallon's nephew.

"Tros is like the northeast wind. I love him. I will go around the world with him," he said. "But I wish he had horses instead of a ship!"

HE TOOK up the peaked iron helmet he had laid on the table, turned it bottom upward and began to rock it like a boat.

Caswallon laughed.

"I bellyache enough on land without adventuring at sea! Fflur physics me about once a month when she thinks I am poisoned, and that is vomiting enough for any man."

Orwic spread his shoulders, filling out his smart blue tunic trimmed with fur.

"I overcame the vomiting last voyage when we took the Spaniards," he said. "I have been promoted. I am master of the ordnance. We can make three hits in five shots with the catapults, whether the ship rolls or not. I will make a sailor. Don't you think so, Tros?"

"Maybe," Tros answered.

Jaun Aksue shook his head. He was what the Britons called a Spaniard, though he and his fellow captives called themselves Eskualdenak.* He had earned his seamanship on the Atlantic hunting whales, and the word Jaun, meaning nobleman, expressed exactly his opinion of himself. From the moment of making him prisoner along with two hundred and fifty compatriots, Tros had never once made the mistake of treating him as anything less than a free man from whom obedience was due, but who obeyed from choice.

"Wait until you have seen the sea!" said Jaun Aksue. "All you have played on yet is this streak of water between Gaul and Britain."

The Druid, watching opportunity, resumed the thread of his remarks, while Aksue and Orwic eyed each other, mutually critical.

"Lord Tros, how will you go to Ostia? Ostia lies leagues from Rome and you can not sail this ship up the Tiber, which is the Roman river. We Druids are informed concerning such things."

"Yes, and you are informed the world is round!" Tros retorted, grinning at him.

But the Druid held to his point.

"How will you go from Ostia to Rome? Will you dare to leave your ship at Ostia? What is to prevent your Northmen then from sailing away and leaving you?"

"I have seen ships anchored, with their oars and sails safely stowed ashore," Tros answered. "None other than myself and Sigurdsen can navigate, and I will take Sigurdsen to Rome with me."

"Then what can prevent the Romans from seizing your ship? They will charge you with piracy. Your father held a Roman license to sail anywhere he pleased; yet how many times have you told us that Cæsar charged him with piracy and flogged the crew to death simply because he disapproved of Cæsar's policy?"

"Zeus!" Tros exploded, spreading his shoulders and kicking his scabbard. "I cross bridges when I reach them."

"There is a bridge to Rome," the Druid answered. "It is Gades. Go first of all to Gades."

"I might," Tros answered. "I have a friend in Gades who owes me money. The place is a Roman port and dangerous, but the gods support a man who seizes danger by the snout."

"Now listen," said the Druid, "for you sail soon, and I would not delay you. You are a bold man and a cunning. Danger is only a challenge to your will. But now there will be dangers to the left and to the right, before you and behind."

"Pluto! Shall I set forth full of dreads and questions? Had I listened to the yawpings of disaster's friends I should never have set foot in Britain! I should never have sunk Cæsar's fleet, never have built my own ship, never have gathered a crew, never have found the stuff to make the hot stink for my catapults! Do you bid me go forth full of fear?"

"Nay, but I bid you beware of risks."

Tros' amber eyes blazed proudly.

"I am the master of the biggest ship that ever sailed these seas! 'Beware of risks!' saith the Lord Druid. Half a thousand souls and all my fortune at the risk of wind and tide, reefs, shoals, gales on the Atlantic, every Roman on the seas my enemy, myself proscribed, three talents on my head, pirates, water and provisions to obtain in harbors that swarm with Cæsar's friends—'Be cautious!' saith the Lord Druid!"

"Be bold, Lord Tros!" said Fflur, her gray eyes watching his. She made a gesture to the Druid; but the Druid signed to her not to interfere.

---

*Known nowadays as Basques.

“Trust Tros!” laughed Orwic. “I tell you he is bolder than the northeast wind!”

Tros struck a gong and glanced at the three water-clocks—bowls, floating in troughs of water set on gimbals—that sank to the bottom in four, twelve and twenty-four hours respectively. A Northman appeared in the doorway.

“Tide?” said Tros.

“Still making. Nearly at the ebb, my lord.”

“Order the blankets stowed below. Wind?”

“Light breeze from the eastward.”

“Mist?”

“All clear, my lord. Sven at the masthead says he can see the coast of Gaul.”

“There,” said Tros, “is the answer of the gods to all your doubts! A fair wind!”

He began to pace the stateroom floor, his hands behind him, kicking at his scabbard as he turned. The Druid watched him, alert for an opening into which to drive an admonition. Tros offered him none. The Druid had to resume the subject uninvited.

“Lord Tros, those Eskualdenak of yours are Cæsar’s men. If they should be caught, they would be crucified—and you along with them. Yet unless you go to Gades first, it is impossible for you to go to Ostia and Rome. I tell you, in the midst of danger you shall find the keys of safety. But beware of black arts and of violence. There are some who seem untrustworthy, whom you may safely trust, and some who may be bought and some not.”

“Rot me all riddles!” Tros answered irritably, but the Druid ignored the remark.

“Lord Tros, I could direct you to a man in Gades, who would give you information. But I see you are not open-minded. Nonetheless, you are a brave man and your heart is true to friendship, so I will do what may be done for you.”

Tros bowed. He thought more of a Druid’s blessing than of his material advice. To his mind the Druids had lost contact between spiritual thought and the action that a man must take with two feet on the ground.

He asked few favors of the unseen universe. He was proud of his own manhood and of the wonder-ship he had designed and built; proud of his own iron will to serve his chosen friends and do it handsomely; and he was almost proud of the crew that was beginning to respond to discipline.

“I GO,” he said, turning to Caswallon, for he felt the ship’s changed motion as the anchor-cable slackened and the wind made her dance a little on the ebb.

The Druid, Caswallon and Fflur stood up to take their leave of him and Fflur’s gray eyes were moist. Caswallon’s face, normally good-humored and amused, wore a mask of stolidness to hide emotion that he scorned as womanly. Orwic looked bored, since that was his invariable refuge from the spurs of sentiment.

“I go,” Tros repeated, and stood straight before them all, the light through the door on his face, and his lion’s eyes glowing against it with the light that blazed up from within. He was minded they should have a bold friend and a brave sight to remember in the dark days coming, when their country should await invasion, and himself afar off. He was minded they should not believe it possible he would neglect to serve them to the last breath and the last ounce of his energy.

“It is thanks to you,” he said, “that I have my ship that was my heart’s desire, and I will not forget you. It may be I will never come again. I am no Druid, and I can not see, like Fflur, with the eyes of destiny. But know ye this: I am a friend in need as in prosperity. Ye may depend on me to worry Cæsar’s rear until he turns away from Britain. But be ready for invasion, because Cæsar certainly intends to try a second time.

“If he invade, resist him to the last ditch, to the last fence, to the last yard of your realm. And though they tell you I am dead or have betrayed you—for Cæsar’s favorite weapon is false rumor—know that I persist until the end in trying all means to weaken Cæsar from the rear. All means I will try, save only what a man may not do and retain his manhood. Truth I will tell to those who will believe it. I will lie, and craftily, to them who deal in lies. Fairly I will deal with honest men. So the gods shall aid me. But believe ye in your own star as well as in my friendship.”

“Good-by!” Fflur said, choking, and embraced him.

Orwic turned away and strode out through the open door. He hated scenes, and his eyes were wet, which would not do at all. He was a British gentleman. Caswallon, muttering, "Ludd's blood!" swung Tros toward him by the arms and smote him on the breast a time or two.

"Tros, Tros!" he said, forcing a grin. "I would rather you would stay here and share Ludd's luck with us! It grieves me that you go."

"Friendship begets grief!" Tros answered, patting the tall, fair-haired chief between the shoulder-blades. "Grief eats courage, so beware of it. Caswallon, my friend, you and I were not born to mope like vultures over vain regrets. Friendship is a fire that tests both parties to it, so let you and me stand firmer, the more circumstances strain. It heartens me to know that you and Fflur have called me friend. I go forth proud of it!"

"Go then!" Caswallon answered, making his voice gruff lest it should tremble. "Ludd's luck go with you! And know this: Come what may—come rumor, and though all the world and Cæsar swear you have played us false, we will believe in you!"

"Tide!" That was Sigurdsen's voice from the poop. "Tide and a fair wind!"

There blew a whistle in between decks, where the captains of the oar-banks piped all rowers to the benches; then a clatter as the oar-blades rattled on the ports in readiness to slide out all together at the word.

"Haul short!" Sigurdsen again. And then a sing-song and a clanking at the capstan.

Tros led the way on deck, his eye aloft to where the clewed-up purple sails were fluttering and Northmen lay along the yards to shake them loose. He turned his back on Orwic, because Fflur wept on the young man's shoulder, and he knew what agonies of shame and nervousness that scene imposed on a British aristocrat. Orwic's funny little peaked helmet had been pushed over one eye, and he was biting his mustache. Caswallon laughed, which brought a curse to Orwic's lips, but Tros leaned overside and shouted at the crew of fishermen who were bringing alongside the barge on which the Druid, Caswallon and Fflur were to go ashore.

"Easy! Easy, you lubbers! If you scrape my paint— Out fenders there!" Tros had spent a small fortune on sulfur and quicksilver to make the ship's sides splendid with vermilion.

There had to be more embracing before Fflur went overside, because the British had a sort of ritual of parting, and it broke down all restraint. Caswallon, though he had mocked at Orwic's misery, let tears stream down his face, not trying to prevent them, unashamed. But Tros, for the sake of the crew that was watching him, preserved his air of grandeur to the end.

He stood the whole deck crew at quarters and saluted with a burst of trumpets and a roll of drums as Fflur and Caswallon went down the ladder, then turned to face the Druid, for the Druid waited.

There grew a silence on the deck and up aloft. The Druid, with his eyes on Tros, drew out the golden sickle from his girdle. He was mild-eyed, but the eyes were bright with fasting and with having contemplated stars and mysteries.

"In the midst of danger thou shalt find the keys of safety," he repeated. "Win Rome in Gades!"

Then the sickle, flashing in the sunlight, moved in mystic circles over Tros' head, severing whatever threads of hidden influence might bind him to the sources of disaster. Upturned, it received, as does the new moon, affluence and wisdom; reversed, it outpoured blessings on his head. Point first, it touched his breast above the heart, invoking honesty and courage; presently it passed in ritual of weaving movements before eyes, ears, nose, lips, hands and feet, arousing all resourcefulness, then tapped each shoulder to confer the final quality of knighthood. Then the Druid spoke:

"Offspring of Earth, Air, Fire, Water and the Nameless, be thyself! Go forth accoutred. As a sun's ray, go thou forth! Be a light amid the darkness! Be a land among the waters! Be a friend among the friendless, and a serpent!* Be a strength amid the weakness! Be a man amid the elements! Whereso thy foot shall tread, be justice done! Whatso thy tongue shall speak, be truth unveiled! Be strong! Be of the gods who give and guide and not of them who snare and take away! That voice within thee, judge thee! Be thy hand the servant of thy soul!"

Blessing ship and crew with arms upraised, lips moving to the said-to-be-forgotten Word, the Druid turned and went, all keeping silence until, like some white-haired pilot of the years, he had descended to the waiting barge.

---

*The symbol of wisdom.

"Up anchor!" Tros roared. Then, and as the clanking capstan brought the cable in, "Make sail there! Sheet her home!"

The purple sails spread fluttering and bellied as the ship swung slowly on the tide before the light breeze. On the poop Tros raised his baton. Drums and cymbals crashed. The oars went out in three long banks on either side. Cymbals again for the "ready" and then crash of brass and alternating drum-beat as the water boiled alongside and the great ship leaped ahead, her serpent's tongue a-flicker in the sun.

"I am a man! I live! I laugh!" Tros told himself as he eyed those purple sails and turned to wave his hand toward the barge that danced amid the gulls along the white wake far astern.

CHAPTER II

OFF GADES.*

HOW TO put into a port controlled by Romans, with part of his crew composed of two hundred and fifty deserters from Cæsar's army, and without falling foul of Cæsar's letters of proscription was a problem that Tros left to the gods to clear up for him, although he already had a hint of the solution in his mind. Meanwhile, there was work a-plenty—head winds and off-shore winds, flat calms with a heavy ground-swell that made the bucking rowers grunt, and squally weather in which whales played all around the ship, nearly causing a mutiny because he would not let Jaun Aksue and his Eskualdenak turn aside to hunt them.

"Thus we kill whales. With a spear we slay them. It is easy. We will slay two. You may tow them into Gades, making haste because the sharks will follow, eating at their undersides. The dead whales float, I promise you, and they are worth much money. Romans buy the meat; the traders buy the bone; the Spaniards buy the skin for sandals, shields, mule-harness—"

"Let live," Tros answered. "I hunt bigger fish."

"Aye, but you pay us nothing. Give us a chance to turn the whale meat into money, that we may drink in Gades. I tell you, Lord Tros, we haven't tasted red wine since the sour, thin stuff that Cæsar fed to us. We Eskualdenak are noblemen, who like to get drunk now and then."

But one of the things that Tros had learned in many foreign ports was the difference between a crew mad drunk on its own earned money, and the same crew equally drunk on its master's bounty.

"You shall drink at my expense in Gades," he remarked, and the tawny-haired soldier of fortune swaggered forward where he discussed with his companions the pros and cons of taking the ship away from Tros and hunting whales until she was full of the bone and blubber.

But Tros could smell the breath of mutiny as wolf smells men afar off, and sent Orwic to them to pretend to sympathize and to be very friendly. Orwic, a soldier of fortune, too, soon won his way into their confidence. It was he, in the forward deckhouse—when the waves were heaving the ship's stern sky-high, burying her serpent in a welter of green, and there were three men at the helm—who made the proposal that they should give Tros one chance to show them a short cut to fortune; whereafter, if he failed them, they would do exactly as they pleased.

To that thay agreed, and swore to it on the blade of a sword, served out to Aksue long ago by Cæsar's chief armorer—a silly little Roman sword, as all agreed, but good enough to swear on. Besides, it was the only weapon Tros had let them keep.

"So now you know," said Orwic, reporting to Tros on the poop.

And for three days and three nights Tros turned that situation over in his mind, while waves, tide, current and the wind fought him a blind battle for the mastery. No sight of sun, no stars nor moon, nothing to gauge direction by except the shrieking wind and—now and then when he dared it—thunder of the surf against high cliffs.

But he only approached the lee shore once or twice until he saw a headland that he recognized, and that was after he had left the dreaded rocks and isles of Finis Terrae† far astern.

And for all that he had only sighted landmarks twice, Tros hove the ship to within sight of Gades Bay in the late afternoon of the eleventh day out from Vectis, sending three men to the mastheads to keep watch for Roman ships and covering the serpent's head with 'paulin lest the setting sun should glitter on its gold-leaf and attract attention from the shore. He knew his ship was notched against the western sky, but her vermilion top-sides merged into the sunset splurge, and it was possible her masts might not be seen if none was actually watching for them.

---

*The modern Cadiz.

†The modern Finisterre and Isle of Ushaut.

Seated at the table in the stateroom by the whale-oil lantern-light he clipped a piece of parchment from a roll, mixed gum with sepia from cuttlefish, chewed the point of a pen to his liking and sent for Orwic.

"Ludd love me, Tros, but the land smells good!" said Orwic, making himself easy on Tros' bunk. We Britons are not fish. I hate the sea."

"Can you speak the Roman tongue?" Tros asked him.

"You know I can't. When I was a boy I learned a few words from a Roman trader who was cast up on the beach. But he was killed soon afterwards for taking liberties with women. Even in the battle on the beach last year I couldn't remember a word of it. I wanted to yell the wrong commands to Cæsar's men and confuse them until our chariots could ride them down and—"

Tros interrupted with a gesture, leaning forward with an elbow on the table.

"But Gaulish? Can you speak that with a Gaulish accent?"

"Near enough. You know as well as I do that we Britons speak the same tongue as the Gauls. What ails you, Tros? Your eyes look like a madman's? Are you ship-sick?"

It was excitement that made Tros' eyes gleam in the swaying, dim oil light. He grinned, showing wonderful teeth.

"Do you dare—" his voice was hoarse with the strain of bellowing his orders to the crew and from the long vigil through the storm—"do you dare, Orwic, to go ashore tonight in Gades with Conops to guide you and none else to deliver a letter at the house of a friend of mine?"

Orwic barked delightedly.

"Friend Tros, I would dare to swim from here to Gades, just for the feel of good earth underfoot!"

"This is a worse risk than a swim," said Tros, clenching his fist for emphasis. "Fail of your errand, boy, there is a low hill behind Gades, just outside the city wall, where cross-roads meet. The hill bristles with dead trees that bear ill-smelling fruit. The Romans flog a man before they crucify him, flog him until his intestines hang and—"

"Rot me talk of failure!" Orwic answered. "Tell me what shall be if I succeed."

Tros' eyes blazed recognition of a spirit he admired, but he had his own way of admonishing lieutenants.

"Success," he said, "might mean that Britain will be saved from Cæsar. But the odds against you, tchutt! I must go myself. I need a cautious man."

"Ludd's belly! Tros, you shall not! Listen to me! Who has better right than I to run a risk for my friends in Britain?"

ORWIC was up on his feet, leaning across the table, his flushed face in the lantern light. He looked as handsome as Apollo.

"Some man," Tros said, "who will realize the danger and take care. No hot-head can succeed on this adventure."

"Tros, I blow cold! I am as crafty as a fox! I forswear horsemanship! I never rode a horse! I never drove a chariot! I am a tortoise! Burn me this great creaking lumber-wain of a tin-bellied boat, and set me only on dry land! I am a paragon of caution! Dumb I am, if you but say the word, a lurker in the shadows, a rap-a-door-and-run man! Tros, there is none aboard this ship who can do the business half as well!"

Tros knew it, but he kept the knowledge to himself. For instance, the forever faithful Conops, if sent ashore alone, might not be trusted not to use his knife. He had made up his mind, but he let Orwic do all the persuading.

"I need a modest man. The gods love modesty," he said with the air of a money-lender refusing to do business.

"I am modesty itself!" said Orwic.

"You!" Tros leaned back in his oaken chair and laughed. "You are so immodest that you think the gods will change the sea to suit your whim! But three nights gone I heard you praying that the storm might cease, instead of praising the sea's splendor and returning thanks for guts enough to ride it out!"

"It was the Northmen prayed," said Orwic.

"Aye. But who bade them? Who paid them? Who gave Skram, the skald,* a gold-piece for his pains? I saw you."

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* A kind of minstrel with peculiar privileges. Like the old-time Scottish Highlanders, who never went on foray without their piper, the Northmen always took their skald on an adventure oversea.

"Tros, you see too much. Our British gods are of field and river, whereas these Northmen are sailors and their gods are—"

"Cripples!" Tros exploded. "Rot me such a god as likes to see good seamen on their knees! There are gods in Gades, Orwic, but they'll go their own gait, and it's for the man who does my work tonight to suit their whimsies, not they his."

"Well, it is I who go. I will be whimsical," said Orwic. "The gods shall like me very well indeed."

He stooped and scooped up sand out of the box that was kept in readiness to put out fire, and heaped six handfuls of the wet stuff on the table. Then he smoothed it out.

"So, draw me Gades. Show me the house I must find."

"Conops knows the house," said Tros, but he drew, none the less, with his forefinger, beginning with a circle for the city wall, then marking the five gates and making dots to represent the forum, the temple of Venus and the gladiators' barracks, with a veritable maze of streets between. "This is the governor's house. Avoid it as you would death! Now, from the western gate due eastward, do you see? Then this way, to the right, to a point about midway along the street. Turn your back to the west, and forward. The house of Simon the Jew stands nearly at the apex of a triangle that has for base the street between the forum and the gladiators' school.

"It is a house built half of timber, half of mud, smeared with a yellow plaster that will make it look like stone by night. Simon is a rich Jew with the privilege of armed slaves—quite a few of them. There will be dozens of dogs in the street and the Gades dogs are bad, I warn you. There used to hang a lantern on a chain from the front of Simon's house to the wall opposite. The citizenry have used that chain a time or two to hang night prowlers. None can approach the house unseen because the lamp has several wicks and casts a bright light."

"I will walk up brazenly," said Orwic.

"And you will find the brassiest-faced Jews in Europe ready for you! They live in the narrow streets near-by and look to Simon to protect them with his influence. They'll swarm out with stones in their hands at the first bleat from Simon's slaves. But there's worse than they. The city is patrolled by armed slaves who belong to the municipium*. The place is ten times better policed than Rome, and there's a law against being out at night without being able to prove lawful business. It is no light task I set you. I think I had better leave you here and go myself."

"Tros, I tell you, I go! I will be safe enough in a Roman costume. They will take me for some gallant pursuing a love affair."

"In the Jews' quarter? I think not," said Tros. "A man can buy a Jewess in the open market almost anywhere where slaves are sold, but no man in his senses goes philandering near a ghetto after dark! The Jews can fight! And if you beat on Simon's door, his slaves will rush out and cudgel you."

"Conops shall beat the door," said Orwic. "While the slaves beat Conops, I will slip into the house."

"Cockerel! I wouldn't lose Conops for his weight in money!"

"Very well. I can wait until dawn outside the house and—"

"No. By morning Simon must have visited my ship. Now listen. Try to forget you are Caswallon's nephew and a prince of Britain. Only remember you are charged with secret business. If you try to show how smart you are, the gods will raise a wall of circumstance around you that will test your wits to the extremity. Go modestly, and they will modify the odds. Bear that in mind. Now, muck me this sand away—so. To the floor with it. Let that Jaun Spaniard clean it up. The rascal rots with laziness. Now, I will write the letter."

He spoke as one who contemplated making magic, and for a while, for the sake of exercising Orwic's patience, he sat listening to the murmur of the short waves overside. Then he wrote swiftly, using Greek, pausing line by line to read aloud and construe it to Orwic:

"Tros, the Samothracian to Simon, son of Tobias, the Jew of Alexandria, in Gades, greeting.

"Be the bearer as a son to you. He is Orwic, son of Orwic, a prince of Britain, nephew to the king who rules the Trinobantes and the Cantii, my true friend. Speak him freely.

"Knowing I have done you service in the past, whereby we both made profit, and aware you are a man of true heart and long memory, whose zeal for great emprises is in no wise dulled by the success that has attended many efforts in the past, I urge that you should come to me with all speed, secretly, tonight, for conference concerning matters that may profit both of us.

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*The local government. Gades was not yet in fact a municipium. Local officials were appointed and removed at pleasure by the Roman governor.

"Lord Orwic will attend you and convey you by the shortest way in safety to my ship.

"This is my true word. So fail not.

"Tros of Samothrace."

He sanded the letter and passed it to Orwic, who frowned at the thick Greek characters which he could read like any other educated Briton, though the Greek tongue puzzled him.

"Will he realize you are in danger? Will he understand you need help? Why not tell him so?" Orwic objected.

"Because I know Simon, son of Tobias!" Tros answered. "If he thought I needed help, he wouldn't come until he had driven a hard bargain first by daylight. But if he thinks there is a stroke of business I can put his way he will come in a hurry to learn the details of it."

"Better not tell him anything about your plans then?"

"Tell him all you know of them!" Tros answered dryly and left the stateroom to watch provisions being weighed out to the galley for the evening meal.

CHAPTER THREE

VISITORS

THE MINUTE the sun dipped below the skyline Tros ordered, "Out oars!" and, taking full advantage of the tide, dropped anchor in pitch darkness almost within hail of a spit of land that jutted into the mouth of Gades Bay. The moisture-laden Virazon, the sea-breeze that blows all night long between spring and autumn had not yet broken the dead calm. There was a stench of rotting seaweed from the shore, a croon of short waves on a sandy beach and, except that, silence.

There was no moon yet, but the starlight shone with milky whiteness that revealed the ghost-white city several miles away, rising tier on tier on a peninsula that was almost an island. About half a mile from where he had anchored a beacon-light flared in an iron basket, and in the distance, to the northward of the city, was a parallelogram of crimson fires that marked the outline of a Roman camp.

By lantern light in the after deck-house, with the ports well shrouded, Tros watched Conops get into the costume of a Greek slave.

"Now remember to act slavish!" he instructed. "Little man, much rests on you this night! To the Lord Orwic be fussily obsequious. See that he treads in no ordure near the gate. Watch that none touches him. Carry a stick to drive the dogs away from him, and use it at the least excuse. Talk Greek to him * no matter that he doesn't understand. To the gate custodians be insolent. If they ask your master's name and business, tell them they may have it and a whipping in the bargain tomorrow morning for their impudence. In a pinch use Simon's name, but not if you can help it, because if they learn you are visiting Simon it might occur to them to extort a bribe from Simon by holding you both in the guardhouse until he comes."

"Trust me, master! I know Gades. There is a place outside the city wall where dancing girls are kept before they ship them for the Asia trade. Too bad we haven't scent of jasmine to make our clothes smell of an afternoon's adventure! Never mind. I'll manage it."

Then Orwic came, jingling a purse of gold and silver coins that Tros had given him, bending to admire the fashion of a Roman pallium and tunic, loot from Cæsar's bireme that Tros had captured a year ago.

"Walk not like a horseman!" Tros protested. "A Roman noble walks with a stride that measures out the leagues. Come, try it on the deck."

Tros strode for him and Orwic imitated. Conops ran in front, pretending to drive dogs away and pointing to guide his feet from pools of filth.

"Go. Go now with the gods in mind," said Tros and turned to give orders to Sigurdsen, who had manned and lowered the long-boat and was waiting to go overside.

"You, who were a king, so do, that if others had obeyed you formerly as you obey me now, you would be a king this day! Your weapons are for a last resort. Be silent, crafty, cunning, cautious—" he emphasized each word with his fist on the Northman's breast—"run rather than resist. If

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*There was a large Greek colony in Gades, where the language was as much in use as any other at that time.

questioned, make no answer. Put one man ashore to follow the Lord Orwic and Conops as far as the city gate. Let him watch from a safe distance and bring word to you when they have passed in. Come back to the ship with the information, taking care to keep the oars well muffled."

Then one last word to Orwic.

"Cover your long hair with your pallium. One gold-piece to the captain of the gate guard. One piece of silver to each of the others. No more, or you'll merely whet their appetites. Ludd's luck!"

The muffled oar-beats thumped away into the dark, and silence fell. The whole crew was aware of mysteries impending. Aloft, the Northmen and some of the Eskualdenak leaned out of the rigging, watching the longboat until its shape was lost in gloom. There began then a murmur of talking between decks, where the weary rowers sprawled. Jaun Aksue, leader of the Eskualdenak, trespassed on the poop without asking for permission and leaned over the rail beside Tros confidently, as if they two were equals.

"Secrecy!" he remarked grinning, and turned his back to the rail to fill his lungs with the first breath of the night wind that began to make the ship swing slowly at her anchor.

Tros swallowed resentment.

"Caution your men to be silent," he said and turned away.

But Aksue laid a strong hand on his arm.

"My men crave wine and shore leave—money. You wouldn't let us kill the whales. We have been eleven days at sea. The Gades girls are famous and the red wine is the best in all Spain."

Tros had hard work to suppress his instinct to knock the man down, but friction with the Eskualdenak just then would have ruined the vague plan he had in mind.

"I saved you men from Cæsar and from the Britons," he answered. "If you're caught in Gades, you'll be crucified."

"Maybe. But you have friends ashore, or you wouldn't be here," said Aksue. "You can give us shore leave if you want to. You can say we're your slaves. We'll act the part, then nobody can interfere with us. We needn't go into the city. There are taverns outside the wall and lots of women. All we demand is a day ashore and some money to spend. Promise that, and we'll keep as quiet as mice 'till morning. Otherwise, I won't answer for what my men will do."

Tros found it easy enough now to tolerate the impudence. That those proud Eskualdenak were willing to act the part of slaves solved more than half of the problem that had racked his brain for days and nights on end. He nodded.

"You shall go ashore."

"And money?"

"I will arrange it. Go and warn your men that if there's any noise tonight, no shore leave!"

For an hour after that Tros paced the poop anxiously, his ears alert for the approach of shipping, for there might be Roman guard-ships on the prowl, and he had given hostages to fortune. Orwic and Conops were friends. He could not put to sea and desert them. Unless or until they returned he must stay where he was.

At the end of an hour he heard splashing, and thought it was dolphins or porpoises. Then, staring into the darkness, he was nearly sure he saw the outline of a boat.

"Sigurdsen!" he shouted, but there was no answer, and he remembered it was much too soon to expect Sigurdsen in the longboat.

BUT the splashing continued, and presently he saw two human heads within a few feet of the ship's side. A voice that he thought was a woman's cried out to him in Greek to throw a rope. He went himself and lowered the rope ladder, ordering the deck-watch to the other bulwark. A man and a woman climbed up like wet shadows and stood dripping in the dark in front of him. The woman wore nothing but a Greek chlamys, with the wreck of a wreath of flowers tangled in her wet hair; the man had on a Roman tunic, that clung and revealed a lithe, athletic figure. They were nearly of a size, and in the dark they looked like children up to mischief.

"Tros!" said the woman, and Tros nearly jumped out of his skin.

Had he been recognized before he had set foot in Gades?

Gesturing with a jerk of the head and arm, he led the way toward the stateroom, where he might learn the worst without the deck-watch hearing it.

At the door he paused and let them pass in ahead of him. For a minute he stood, making sure that the deck-watch were not near enough for eavesdropping, wondering how many of them had seen the swimmers come aboard. When he entered the stateroom the girl had already clothed herself in his own best purple cloak, that had been hanging on the rail between the bunk and bulkhead.

"Tros!" she said. "Tros of Samothrace!" And she laughed at him.

She seemed no whit worse for her swim, although the man was squatting on the floor and looked exhausted. She curtsied with a rhythm of bare legs. There was no fear in her eyes, nor even challenge, but a confidence expressed in laughter and a gesture of disarming comradeship.

"Lord Tros," she began again.

"I am not Tros," he answered sullenly.

He was afraid. Of all the difficulties in the world he dreaded most a complication with a woman.

"Oh yes, you are!" she answered. "Horatius Verres saw your ship at sunset notched against the sky. He recognized it instantly. He was in hiding on the roof of Pkauchios' *ergastulum*.* He is a runaway from Gaul. I am Chloe, the dancer, Pkauchios' slave. I am the favorite of Gades," she added, as if she were not particularly proud of it but simply stating fact.

"What do you want with me?" Tros asked her sullenly. That the girl's ivory-white skin shone golden in the whale-oil lantern light, and that her face was like a cameo against the shadow, only deepened his mistrust. He retired two paces from her and stood with his back against the door.

"Only what I can get!" she answered, and sat on Tros' bunk, arranging his pillows behind her, covering her bare knees with his blanket. "I could tell Balbus, the governor, who you are, but I won't if you will bargain fairly."

Tros glanced at the man on the floor, who was slapping his head to get the water from his ears.

"As prisoners—" he suggested.

Chloe interrupted, laughing.

"I am a slave who owns slaves. My women know where I am. I have two men-slaves waiting on the beach."

"Who is this fellow?" Tros asked.

"I told you. Horatius Verres. He had a little difficulty with the Romans and had to run away from Gaul. If what he said is true, he lost his heart to a girl whom Cæsar coveted—some young matron, I suppose, or Cæsar wouldn't have looked twice at her. Some one, to earn Cæsar's favor, accused poor Horatius Verres of accepting bribes so that Cæsar might send him to Rome in fetters and keep the young woman for himself. But she found out the plot in time and warned him. So he slew the informer and tried to escape to Britain in one of four biremes that Cæsar was sending along with some Eskualdenak to invade that country.

"Somebody—" she looked merrily at Tros—"attacked those biremes, destroyed three of them, and captured a lot of the Eskualdenak. The fourth bireme escaped to Gaul with Horatius Verres still on board, but he swam away before they reached port and escaped a second time overland. He reached Gades in a dreadful state, but I could see he was a pretty boy under all the rags and whiskers, so I hid and saved him from Balbus' labor gang, because he had told me his real name and an interesting story. I hid him on the roof of my master's *ergastulum*, and later, when he was rested, I sent him to Simon the Jew, thinking Simon might do something for him, because Simon owes me money and can't pay."

"Can't pay? You say Simon can't pay what he owes you?"

She nodded.

"So you know Simon? Well, he has lent nearly all his money to Cæsar and Balbus, who pay back only when it suits them."

"Go on," said Tros, his fingers clutching at his sword-hilt.

He could not have asked a greater favor from the gods than that Simon should be short of money at the moment; but he was afraid of this woman, and still more afraid lest she should realize it.

"Simon was shocked and virtuous," she continued. "He would have informed Balbus if I hadn't reminded him of a few little things I know about himself. He agreed to say nothing, but he was afraid to do anything, so Horatius Verres had to return to his hiding place. I was asleep this afternoon when he sighted your ship from the roof of the *ergastulum*, but he called to me through the window of my cottage in Pkauchios' garden and said he would be safe if he could reach your ship, so I came with him to help him pass the gate guards, and then came out here for the fun of it. I wanted to see Tros the Samothracian."

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*A private prison kept for the punishment of slaves.

"And are you satisfied?" Tros asked her.

He knew the reputation of the Gades dancing girls—intrigue, well educated villainy, greed, ulterior motives. He was sure that this one would not have dared to visit him unless convinced of her own safety. Perhaps she knew Orwic and Conops were ashore and was counting on them as hostages to prevent her from being carried off to sea before daylight.

She looked at him long and steadily, then nodded with a little uplift of her Grecian nose and a droop of the eyelids that suggested confidence in her own skill to read character.

"Why did you come to Gades?" she asked. "Balbus, the governor knows you are a pirate. I have heard him talk of it."

"I came to see Simon," Tros answered, and watched her to judge the effect.

BY HER face, by her manner, by the sudden, puzzled frown with a hint of speculation underlying it, he judged that she did not know about his having sent two messengers ashore. And her next words confirmed the guess.

"Simon has much less influence than my master Pkauchios, who is an astrologer whom all men fear. If you will hide Horatius Verres on your ship, I will speak for you to Pkauchios. He is almost the only man who dares to go to Balbus at any hour of the night. He could make Balbus afraid to interfere with you by talking about the stars and portents and all that nonsense. Then, what do you want to do? You know—" she looked at him keenly and impudently— "you can buy me. I have much influence in Gades."

"How much are you worth?" Tros asked her.

"My value in the market? Two hundred thousand sesterces!* You don't believe it? Pkauchios had to pay the tax on that amount. He entered me on the list at much less, but the Roman who had farmed the taxes from Balbus ordered me sold at auction, so Pkauchios had to admit the higher value or else lose me to the highest bidder and pay a tax on the sale in the bargain. But I did not mean you should buy me. I meant you can buy my influence."

But in a world full of uncertainties, if there was one thing sure, it was that buying dancing women's influence was as unthrifty a proceeding as to throw the money overboard. The only end to it would be the bottom of the thrower's purse. Tros stared at Horatius Verres.

"How did you obtain her influence?" he asked. "Did you pay for it?"

The man smiled and troubled himself to rise before he answered.

"Money?" he asked with a shrug of his shoulders. He had all the gestures of a well bred man, and he was handsome in a dark way, although his eyes were rather close together. "I had no money. I made love to her. Who wouldn't? She thought it a merry jest at first. But I convinced her by threatening to yield myself to Balbus if she wouldn't believe my heart is hers."

"Oh, I wasn't convinced, but he is a pretty liar," Chloe interrupted. "So I decided to help him and get rid of him," she added with a swift glance at the Roman, who was watching Tros.

But Tros saw the glance and placed his own interpretation on it.

"I will keep you on my ship," he said to Verres. "And I won't enslave you, but I won't trust you until I know you better."†

Verres bowed acknowledgment.

"I am grateful," he said, smiling again with a peculiar boyish up-twist of the mouth.

Tros was about to speak again, but the deck-watch shouted, and a man came running to the stateroom door—pounded on it.

"Sigurdsen comes!"

Tros either had to go on deck or else summon Sigurdsen into the cabin. He did not want the deck crew in his confidence. He signed to Chloe and Verres to hide themselves in the dark corner, where his clothes hung between bunk and bulkhead, not wishing, either, to discuss his visitors with Sigurdsen, preferring to keep information to himself until the time came to make use of it. As he would have to talk to Sigurdsen in Gaulish there was a chance that Chloe, at any rate, might not understand the conversation. He would keep the

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*About $8,500—a very high, but not an unheard of price for a slave who could make enormous profits for her master.

†It would have been quite simple for Tros lawfully to enslave Verres. For instance, on arrival at some other port he could have presented a bill for passage money, and if Verres did not pay that, he could attach his person for debt.

Roman on the ship, so that it did not matter whether he should understand or not.

CHAPTER IV

GADES BY NIGHT

ORWIC jumped on to the seaweed-littered beach, slipped on a heap of the slimy stuff and sprawled among the scampering crabs, where Conops helped him to his feet.

"A bad omen, Lord Orwic. A bad omen!"

But the Britons were not addicted to the vice of reading omens in every accident.

"Go back in the boat, if you're afraid," Orwic answered. So Conops started to lead the way on the five-mile walk toward the city across a dark, ill-smelling wilderness of sand and scrub where anything might happen. And Sigurdsen sent Skram, the skald to follow them.

They found a road after a while, with a stinking ditch on either side of it, and before long saw the lights of the drinking booths, brothels and slaughter yards outside the wall, where there was neither day nor night but one long pandemonium of vice and lawlessness. And soon after that the first of the scavenger dogs, prowling in search of stray goats or forgotten offal, winded them and started a yelp that brought the pack.

Thereafter, they had to fight their way with knife and stick, not daring to gather stones lest the ferocious brutes should snatch that opportunity to rush them while they stooped. But the noise called no attention from the slums, where a dog-fight in the dark was nothing new, and when Skram, judging he was close enough to the gate, lay down to watch, the dogs devoted all their efforts to attacking him, leaving Orwic and Conops free to approach the gate with a semblance of Roman dignity. There Conops took command.

There was a foot-gate in the midst of one side of the double, iron-strapped wooden one that had been closed at sunset; and in the midst of the small gate was a grilled opening that the guard could look through, and above that a lantern on an iron bracket.

Long before they came into the lantern light Conops began talking fussily in Greek.

"This way, master! That way! Mind the muck there! Dionysus! But the wine those rascals sell has madness in it! Master, master, try to walk straight!" Any one who understood Greek could not help but know a Roman gentleman was coming from an evening's entertainment.

"There, master, give me your purse and lean against the wall while I call the gate guard!"

Conops set his ugly face against the grill and whistled.

"Quick!" he commanded. "My master is drunk, and ill-tempered because he has been robbed."

"Who is he?" a voice asked through the grill.

"None of your business! Be quick, unless the lot of you want to be whipped in the morning!"

"Was he robbed of his purse?"

"Dionysus! No. What do you take me for? I keep his purse."

"Well, you know what it costs. One gold piece from each of you to the man on duty, and then the officer—he makes his own terms."

"Fool!" Conops roared at him. "Open! If you knew who waits you'd tremble in your mongrel skin!"

The guard vanished. A moment later Conops heard him reporting through the guard-house window to his officer, and he made haste to improve the passing moment.

"Master, master!" he yelled. "Don't beat me! I'm doing my best! Order those blackguards in the guard-house beaten for daring to keep you waiting. Ow! Ow! Master, that hurts!"

The captain of the guard came—a Numidian, as coal-black as the shadows, rolling the whites of his eyes in an effort to see through the grill, his breath reeking of garlic.

"Who?" he demanded.

"You'll pay smartly for it if I have to tell you!" Conops answered. "Hurry up now! Two gold pieces for you to hold your tongue and shut your eyes. Some silver for your men. My master's drunk. I pity you, if you keep him waiting!"

A great key jangled on a ring. The lock squeaked. Conops threw his arm around Orwic, whose face was smothered in the fold of his pallium.

"Act very drunk!" he whispered, and hustled him through the narrow opening.

On the far side he pushed him into the darkest shadow, where dim rays from a lantern showed the broad blue border of a Roman tunic and the sandaled legs below it, but nothing else. There was a chink of money. The Numidian signed to half a dozen men to retire into the guard-house.

"Remind him when he's sober that I let him in without a fuss," he said grinning. "Who is he?"

Conops laid a hand on the black man's shoulder and leaned toward him as if to whisper, then apparently thought better of it.

"No," he said, "mind your own business. That's wisest. I'll remind him you were civil."

"All right. Don't forget now! I'll remember you, you one-eyed Greek! If I see you and ask a favor some time—"

But Conops was gone, his left arm around Orwic and his right hand closed on something that, it seemed, he valued—possibly the purse. The captain of the gate guard may have thought so.

"Act drunk—drunk—drunker than that!" he whispered. "Strike a blow at me!"

It was too early for the streets to be deserted and the danger was of meeting Romans or some citizen who might imagine he recongized the drunken man and speak to him for the fun of it. But the street was crooked and the upper stories of the houses leaned out overhead until they almost met, creating a tunnel of gloom into which the yellow light from doors and windows streamed at intervals. The moment they were out of sight of the guard-house Conops advised a change of tactics.

"Now sober! Now walk swiftly, as if we had serious business. Stride, man! Stride out! Remember you're a Roman!"

But the spirit of adventure was in Orwic's veins. It was the first time he had seen a foreign city. Men who stood in doorways, house-fronts, litters of the wealthy merchants borne on the shoulders of slaves—all was new to him and stirred his curiosity. Above all, as they threaded through the maze of narrow streets, the glimpse through certain open doors attracted him. For Gades had not yet been zoned, as Rome was, more or less, and as Lunden did not need to be. There were cavernous, whitewashed cellars visible from mid-street, in which women danced to the jingling strains of strings and castanets.

Naked-bellied women ran from one door, seizing Orwic, trying to drag him in to drink and witness Gadean indecency. One pulled away the pallium that hid the lower portion of his face and Conops struck at her too late; she glimpsed the long, fair hair that fell to the Briton's shoulders, screamed of it, tried to tug the pallium again.

"*Haie*, girls! A barbarian! A rich barbarian! Let's teach him."

THE owner of the place came out, a bull-necked Syrian who tried to keep Conops at bay while the slave-women struggled to hustle their quarry down steps into the cellar whence the din of music and the reek of wine emerged. The scuffle drew attention from a guard of the municipium, street corner lurking, watching for a chance to blackmail somebody. He came on the run and, wise in all the short cuts to extortion, picked on Conops as a slave worth money, worth redeeming from the lock-up.

Too quick for him, Conops stepped into the light that streamed from the cellar doorway, showed him something in the palm of a secretive hand. Whatever it was, the Syrian saw it, too, and drove the women down the cellar steps. The guard of the municipium strolled away, the Syrian grew laughingly apologetic. Conops led up-street in haste and around three corners before he paused and let Orwic come abreast.

"What did you show him?" Orwic asked.

"Oh, only a bronze badge I stole from that fool Numidian at the gate."

They reached the wide street running crosswise of the city—wide, that was, for Gades, where there was no wheeled traffic because of the house-fronts that jutted out promiscuously and the arches and bottle-necked passages—passed a temple of Venus, rawly new, of imported Sicilian marble, where Orwic's British eyes stared scandalized at the enormous figure of the naked goddess colored in flesh tints and bathed in the flickering light of torches,* and turned due eastward, up an alley between high, blind walls where the air smelt stale and filthy and there was not room for two men to pass without squeezing.

There, in the stinking dark, men slept who had to be stepped over carefully. Some swore when awakened and followed with drawn knives, so that Conops walked backward, his own long knife-blade tapping on the wall to give the night-pads warning he was armed.

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*The Britons did not make use of the human figure though their art was of a very high order.

And there were high doors in the walls, set in dark and unexpected corners, where men lurked who stepped out suddenly and blocked the way, demanding an alms with no humility. Conops slipped under Orwic's arm and trounced one of them with the handle of his knife, whereafter Orwic called a halt for consultation.

"Tros recommended caution," he remarked. "We can not fight all the thieves in Gades. Yet if we fee one rascal he will call his gang to murder us for the purse. We would be better off in the cellar where the women were; they might have taken our money without killing us, or so it seems to me. Pick me up that rascal. Has he breath left? Can he speak? So. Offer him silver to lead us to the house of Simon and keep other rogues at bay."

So, for a while they went preceded by a man in rags who announced in low growls to fellow-prowlers of the Gades underworld that these were privileged night-passengers who had paid their footing, and none offered to molest them after that, except one leper, who demanded to be paid to keep his filthy sores at a distance. He was of the aristocracy of beggardom and bound by no guild restrictions.

And so into the ghetto, where another sort of night life teemed in crowded alleyways. Iron-barred windows and a reek of pickled fish; sharp voices raised in argument; song, pitched in minor melancholy with an undertone of triumph; secrecy suggested by the eye-holed shutters; ugliness; no open doors, yet doors that did open secretively as soon as they had passed, to afford a glimpse of the unwelcome strangers.

At the end of a few turns the beggar-guide professed to have lost himself, demanded his money and decamped. Orwic remembered the plan Tros drew in sand on the cabin table, but could not see that it faintly resembled any of these winding alleys. Conops, sailor by profession, had the bearings in his head, but could make nothing of the maze confronting them.

"Let us return to the temple of Venus and start again," he suggested. "There used to be an alley that ran nearly straight from there to Simon's house."

But Orwic plunged forward at random toward a corner where a dim lamp burned in an iron bracket. Conops warned him they were followed and struck the blade of his long knife against a door-post, but Orwic turned and stuck his foot into a door that had opened just sufficiently to give a view of him. Conops who knew Gades ghetto's reputation, tried to pull him back.

"Caution!" he urged.

But Orwic was already inside. There was a leather screen, and Conops could not see him. He had to follow, and the door slammed at his back. The screen masked the end of a short, narrow passage that turned into a room, where there were voices and a dim light. Conops used up a few seconds lunging in the darkness with his knife to find out who and where the man was who had slammed the door. Then he groped for the door, but failed to find the lock, his fingers running up and down smooth wood. He could hardly even find the crack between door and frame.

"*Oimoi! Olola!* Tros was mad to send a Briton!"

Some one chuckled in the darkness. He lunged with his knife at the sound, but hit nothing, then decided to try the passage and the voices and the light. But first he knocked the screen down, being a Greek strategist. A clear line of retreat, even toward a locked door, seemed better than nothing.

He found Orwic in a room whose walls were higher than its length or breadth. Somewhere in the darkness overhead there was a gallery that creaked, suggesting people up there listening, but the one dim lamp was below the gallery, its flickering light thrown downward by a battered bronze reflector. There was a smell of oil, spice, leather and tallow, but nothing in the room except a leather-covered table and two stools. Orwic leaned against the table. An old Jew sat facing him on one of the stools, his knees under the table and his back against the wall. The Jew wore the robes of his race and a dirty cloth cap, beneath which the oily ringlets coiled on either side of bright black eyes. He was scratching his curled beard as he contemplated Orwic.

"SIMON!" said Orwic. "Simon! Simon!"

The Jew glanced at Conops, who stood sidewise in the door, tapping his knife against the post and swaying himself to see into the shadows.

"Is he drunk?" he asked, speaking Greek. "My name isn't Simon."

"Simon, son of Tobias of Alexandria," said Conops. "Where is his house? We seek him."

"Every one in Gades knows the house of Simon, son of Tobias of Alexandria," the old Jew answered. "Why do you break into my house?"

Conops showed him the bronze badge, stolen from the captain of the gate guard, but that had no effect whatever.

"Such a thing will get you into trouble," said the Jew. "You have no right to it. That belongs to a captain of the slaves of the municipium."

Conops began to be thoroughly frightened. The stealthy sounds in gallery and passage and the confident curiosity of the old Jew assured him he was in a tight place.

"Master, let's go!" he urged in Gaulish.

But Orwic could see no danger, and the Jew smiled, his lower lip protruding as he laid a lean hand on the table.

"A Gaul? Ah! And a Greek slave? Who is your master?" he asked Conops. "What does he want with Simon ben Tobias of Alexandria? What is a Gaul doing with a Greek slave? You must tell me. Come and stand here."

He pointed to the floor beside him. Conops obeyed, knife in hand, well satisfied to stand where he could hold the old Jew at his mercy at the first suggestion of attack.

"Put your knife away. Slaves are not allowed to carry weapons," said the Jew, and again Conops obeyed. He could redraw the knife in a second. "Who is your master? Why did you come to my house?"

Orwic seemed perfectly undisturbed, although he kept on sniffing at the strange smells.

"Tell him to show us the way to Simon's house," he said patiently.

"You would never be admitted into Simon's house at this hour," said the Jew. "There are always his slaves in the street, and they protect his house unless they know you. Do they know you?"

"Tell him," said Orwic, "that we have a letter for Simon."

But the Jew seemed to understand the Gaulish perfectly.

"Show me!" he remarked, and held his hand out.

"Don't you, master! Don't you!" Conops urged, but Orwic had not understood the Greek. He had supposed the Jew demanded money to show the way.

The Jew's eyes gleamed in the direction of the door. Conops turned instantly. There were three Jews in the passage—confident, young, strong, armed with heavy leather porters' straps, which was a weapon quite as deadly as a knife. They leaned with their backs against the passage wall and gazed through into the room with insolent amusement.

"Simon is my friend," said the Jew. "If it is true you have a letter, I will take it to him. You wait here. But I don't believe you have a letter. You are robbers. Who should send strangers with a letter to Simon at this hour of the night?"

Conops explained that to Orwic.

"Tell him he may come with us and satisfy himself," said Orwic, beginning to be piqued at last.

"Which of you has the letter?" the old Jew demanded, and the three young Jews in the passageway advanced into the room, as if they had been signalled.

"I can kill all three of those!" said Conops grimly.

His hand went like lightning to his knife-hilt, but a woman screamed in the gallery and smashed something. Conops and Orwic glanced up, and in the same second each found himself caught in a rawhide noose, arms pinioned.

They fought like roped catamounts with teeth and feet, but the three young Jews were joined by others, who helped to kneel on them and tie them until they could not move, the old Jew sitting all the while, his back against the wall, as if the whole proceeding were quite usual and did not interest him much.

He said something in a sharp voice, and the men began to search their prisoners.

One of them tossed the purse on to the table. Orwic's short Roman sword followed, then Conops' knife and the bronze badge taken from the gate guard. At last the letter was discovered, tucked under the belt of Orwic's tunic. The old Jew read it, knitting his brows, sitting sidewise so as to hold it toward the light, his lean lips moving as he spelled the words.

"Eh? Tros of Samothrace! Eh?"

He rolled up the letter and thrust it in the bosom of his robe, then spoke rapidly in Aramaic to the Jews who were squatting beside their prisoners. Presently he opened the purse on the table, counted the money, closed it, threw it down, called to the woman, who tossed down a cloak from the gallery and left the house, shuffling along the passage-way in slippers.

CHAPTER V

CHLOE—*"QUI SALTAVIT PLACUIT"*.

TROS and Sigurdsen stood over by the water-clocks, the full width of the ship from where Chloe and Horatius Verres sat in hiding. But Sigurdsen's voice was a sailor's and, the Gaulish being foreign to him, he spoke it with peculiar emphasis.

"Skram was badly bitten by the dogs," said Sigurdsen. "He saw both men enter the city, and he is afraid now he will go mad from dog-bite. The other men think Skram will bite them. They talk of killing him for a precaution."

Tros groped in a corner.

"Take this," he commanded. "Tell Skram and all those other fools that the Druids gave it to me. It'll sting, mind. You'll have to hold him while you rub it on. Tell Skram that if he drinks nothing but water, and eats no meat for three days, he'll recover and the dogs'll die. Tell him I said that. Then put Skram to bed, choose another in his place, and row back to the shore to wait for Orwic, Conops and the man they'll bring with them."

Sigurdsen departed and presently Skram's yells announced the application of the pine-oil dressing to sundry tender parts of his anatomy. Being a skald, he had a strong voice trained to out-yell storms and drunken roistering.

Chloe came out of the dark into the whale-oil lantern light.

"You have sent men ashore?" she asked. "To get in touch with Simon? At this hour of the night? They'll fail! They'll be caught by Balbus' city guards, or be killed by the Jews." She thought a minute. "Better have sent me! Were they slaves?"

"They are friends," Tros answered. "Where did you learn Gaulish?"

She laughed.

"Pkauchios sent me to Gaul one time to dance for Cæsar."

"Why did Pkauchios send you to Cæsar?"

"Pkauchios' business is to know men's secrets. But I failed that time. Cæsar is no fool."

She sat on the bunk again, covering her bare knees with a blanket, and for an hour Tros talked to her, he pacing up and down the cabin floor and she regaling him with all politics of Gades.

"Balbus bleeds the place," she told him. "Balbus pretends to be Cæsar's friend, but he is the nominee of Pompey the Great, who has all Spain for his province but stays in Rome and has men like Balbus send him all the money they can squeeze out of their governorships, not that a good percentage doesn't stick to Balbus' fingers. Balbus intends to rebuild the city. If those men you sent ashore get caught by the city guard, they'll find themselves in the quarries sometime tomorrow. Balbus has forbidden the export of male slaves, because he wants to glut the market, so as to buy them cheap for his labor gangs. He sentences all able-bodied vagrants to the quarries. He will crucify you, though, if he catches you, unless—"

"Are there any Roman war-ships in the harbor?" Tros asked her.

"Only one guard-ship, a trireme, but it's hauled out for repairs. The spring fleet hasn't come yet, and the fleet that wintered here has gone to Gaul with supplies and recruits for Cæsar's army."

"When is the spring fleet expected?"

"Any day. It's overdue. The spring fleet comes with the merchant ships to protect them from the pirates. They say the pirates are getting just as bad as they were before Pompey the Great made war on them; and they say, too, that Pompey is too lazy to go after them again, or else afraid that Cæsar's friends might take advantage of his absence. You know, Pompey and Cæsar pretend to be great friends, but they're really deadly enemies, and now that Crassus, the richest man in the world, has gone to Syria, people are saying it's only a matter of time before Cæsar and Pompey are at each other's throats. Until now they've both been afraid of Crassus' money bags, which seems silly to me. The winner could kill Crassus—"

"And which side does Balbus take?"

The girl laughed.

"Balbus takes his own side, just like all the rest of us. *Balbus aedificabit.** He hopes to win fame by making Gades a great city. If Cæsar should win in the struggle that everybody knows is coming, well—

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*Balbus intends to build.

Balbus is Cæsar's friend. If Pompey wins, Balbus is Pompey's nominee and very faithful to him."

"What about you?" Tros asked her.

"What do I matter? I am a dancing girl, a slave—the property of Pkauchios the Egyptian."

"Which way lie your sympathies?" Tros insisted.

"With me, of course, with Chloe. But Balbus loves me, if that is what you mean. He would buy me, if I weren't so terribly expensive. And he would find some way of freeing me from Pkauchios, if Pkauchios weren't so useful to him."

"How?"

"Pkauchios reads the stars, and prophesies. Quite a lot of what he says comes true."

"Sorcery, eh?"

"Call it that if you like. Pkauchios owns other dancing girls besides me. We are all of us rather well trained at picking up information."

"You say you know Cæsar. You like him?"

"Who could help it? He's handsome, intelligent—oh, how I hate fools!—he has manners, fascination, courtesy. He can be cruel, he can be magnanimous, he thrills you with his presence, he's extravagant—as reckless as a god with his rewards. Oh, he's wonderful! There isn't any meanness in him, and when he looks at you, you simply feel his power. You can't help answering his questions. And then he just looks away—like this."

Chloe broke into a song that had become current wherever women followed in the wake of Roman arms:

> "If my love loves not me,
> May a bear from the mountains hug him."

"So now you love Balbus instead?" Tros suggested.

"Bah! Thirty thousand Balbuses are not worth half of Cæsar! I said, Balbus loves *me*. But he is much too mean to buy me. What are two hundred thousand sesterces to a man who can tax all Gades and sell judgments and confiscate traitors' property? I myself own more than two hundred thousand sesterces."

"Then why don't you buy your own freedom?"

"Two good reasons. One is, that I placed my peculium* in Simon, the Jew's hands, out of the reach of Pkauchios. And Simon can't repay me at the moment, though he's honest in money matters like most of the rich Jews. The other is, that if I buy my freedom, I would still be Pkauchios' client. I couldn't leave Gades without his permission."

"And—?"

Tros felt himself on the scent of something. He experienced that strange thrill, unexplainable, that precedes a discovery. He shot questions at random.

"Why didn't you deposit your money with the temple priests, as most slaves do?"

"Because the priests hate Pkauchios. They would rob me to spite him. Simon is more honest."

Possibly she felt in Tros something like that same compelling force that she said had made her answer Cæsar's questions. After a moment's pause she answered:

"I didn't want my freedom until—" she glanced at the dark corner where Horatius Verres sat in silence—"you see, I had more liberty without it. As a slave there are few things I can't do in Gades."

"But—?" Tros insisted.

She shuddered.

"Roman law! If my master should be charged with treason they would have to take my evidence under torture. No escape from that. A slave's evidence against her master mayn't be taken any other way. Some of them die under torture. None of them are much good afterwards. They're always lame, and the fire leaves scars."

TROS whistled softly to himself, pacing the cabin floor, his hands behind him. Suddenly he turned on her.

"You didn't come here just for Horatius Verres' sake! You didn't cross that marshland in the dark for the fun of a swim to a pirate's ship! You called me a pirate just now. You had Verres' word for that. Whose else?"

"Cæsar wrote to Balbus to be on the watch for you. I saw the letter. It came by the overland mail three weeks ago."

"You a slave, and you risk yourself on a pirate's ship?"

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*The private fortune of a slave. Many masters encouraged slaves to purchase their own freedom, since then the master received a high price and retained a valuable "client" who was still bound to him by various restrictions.

"Well, I thought I would make friends with you."

"Why?"

"Because, if Pkauchios gets into difficulties, I might be able to escape to somewhere. Almost anywhere would do."

Tros, pacing the floor again, turned that over in his mind, reflecting that if she were willing to risk herself in what she supposed were a pirate's hands, she must be in serious danger of the Roman torturers. Pkauchios, her master, must be well into the toils. However, he was not quite sure yet that she was telling him the truth.

"You say Balbus loves you and would torture you?" he asked. "He is the governor, isn't he? He can overrule the court. He would find some excuse—"

"Bah!" she interrupted. "Balbus would enjoy it! You should see him at the circus. He isn't satisfied unless a dozen horses break their legs under the chariot wheels. See him at the spectacles. He likes the agony prolonged. A month ago he had a woman scourged and then worried by dogs, but he gave her a stick to defend herself and it took the brutes an hour to kill her. Balbus pretends he does it for the people's sake, but he makes them sick. It is he who likes it!"

Tros grinned pleasantly. The girl was trembling, trying to conceal it. He perceived he might make use of her, but fear, and the more of it the better, though a safe spur, would not provide against her treachery. He must supply hope, practical and definite. However, first another question, to make sure he was not wasting time and wit:

"So, after all, you have no real influence with Balbus?"

"That I have! I say, he loves me! I whisper, and he favors this or that one. But he would get just as much pleasure out of seeing me tortured as he does out of hiring me from Pkauchios to dance before his guests. He would say to the world, 'See how just I am. Behold my impartiality. I torture even Chloe, *qui saltavit, placuit*.'* Then he would enjoy my writhings! He would enjoy them all the more because he loves me."

Tros stood staring at her, arms akimbo.

"Do you think, at a word from you, Balbus would admit me into Gades?" he asked.

"That would come better from Pkauchios. Pkauchios can go to him at any hour and say he has read portents in the stars," she answered.

"Can you manage Pkauchios?"

She frowned, then nodded.

"Yes. But he is dangerous. He will try to put you to his own use." Suddenly she laughed. "Let Pkauchios go to Balbus and prophesy that Tros the Samothracian will enter the harbor at dawn in his great red ship. It is red, isn't it? So Cæsar's letter said."

"Vermilion, with purple sails!" Tros answered proudly.

"And let Pkauchios say to Balbus that Tros of Samothrace is destined to render him a very great service. At dawn, the first prophecy will come true. So Balbus will believe the second and will receive you eagerly."

Tros nodded. He well knew the Romans' superstitious reverence for signs and omens. But he also knew the notorious treachery of the dancing girls of Gades, so there remained to pin down this one's friendship for himself.

"Do you care for pearls?" he asked her, and she gasped.

He took a big one with his thumb and finger from the pocket in his belt and placed it on the palm of her extended hand.

"You shall have enough of those," he said, "to make a necklace."

"But a slave mayn't wear them."†

"You shall buy your freedom from your master."

"But Simon can't give me my money!"

"And if all plans fail, you shall escape with me on my ship—you and Horatius Verres."

"If?" she said, watching him, weighing the pearl in the palm of her hand.

"If you give to me in full, meanwhile, your influence in Gades! If you work for me ten times as faithfully as you have ever served your master! If you fail me in nothing, and lend me all your wit and all your knowledge."

"A bargain!" she exclaimed and held the pearl between her lips a moment. Then, suddenly, "Show me the rest of them! How many pearls?"

"You shall have them at the right time. Their number will depend on you," Tros answered, stepping to the door. He heard the oar-thumps of the long-boat. "How will you go back?"

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*Who danced and pleased. These famous words were a motto on a Roman dancer's tombstone.

†The Roman law was very strict as to who might wear pearls.

"I will swim."

He shook his head. "I will send you ashore. Say nothing to the men. But how will you reach the city? There will be no Horatius Verres this time to fight the dogs off and protect you."

"I told you I am a slave who owns slaves. I have two men waiting for me on the beach."

Tros heard the deck-watch challenge and Sigurdsen's answering howl from close at hand.

"There is time yet," he said, glancing at the water-clock. "Hide there." He pointed to the dark corner where Horatius Verres sat. "If this is Simon coming, don't let him see you. Slip out when he enters the cabin and I will order my boatmen to row you to the beach."

Then he peered at Verres. He could hardly see his outline in the shadow under the row of clothing.

"You," he said, "stay where you are, and don't let me hear a sound from you!"

CHAPTER VI

HEROD BEN MORDECAI

TROS went to the deck and peered over the bulwark into darkness. There was a half-moon now, but the ship's shadow covered the long-boat and he could only vaguely see the shapes of four men sitting in the stern, one of whom was hugely fat, unquestionably Simon.

Sigurdsen climbed to the deck and grumbled, using Norse oaths:

"Helpless! Weighs like six men! Have to hoist him!"

"Orwic? Conops?"

"Haven't seen them. Fat man rode horseback to the beach. Asked for you. Others are his servants."

Sigurdsen ordered a rope rove through a block on the after yard-arm and a bight put in the end of it. Tros leaned overside.

"Simon!" he called. "Simon ben Tobias?"

A hoarse voice answered him. Question and answer followed in a mixture of three languages, but Tros could hardly hear what Simon said.

"Ho there!" he exploded. "Put a parceling on that rope? Will you cut good Simon's rump in halves? Now steady. That's a nobleman of Gades, not a sack of corn!"

They walked the grunting weight up to the bulwark rail and swung him inboard, where Tros received him in strong arms.

"*Simon, salaam! Salaam aleikum. Marhaba fik!*"

"Peace? Blessing? There is none in Gades!" Simon answered, wheezing with fatness and asthma. "Curses on this night air. There is death in it! Tros, Tros, I can not pay the debt I owe you!"

Tros hurried him into the stateroom, a slave, who had clambered up the ship's side, fussily arranging shawls around the old Jew's shoulders. A second slave helped a lean man up over the bulwark, who followed in uninvited.

"Door—door—shut the door!" Simon gasped in Greek, the language he had grown more used to than his native tongue.

The two slaves slammed it and remained outside. Tros helped Simon into a chair beside the table and then turned to face the second man, an old Jew in a cloak and a dirty cloth cap, beneath which long black ringlets curled beside his eyes. He disliked the man at once instinctively.

"Who is this?"

Simon, coughing apoplectically, answered—

"Herod ben Mordecai."

It might have been the cough, but it appeared to Tros he did not like the name.

"A friend?" he asked.

Simon did not answer—only coughed again, his tongue between his teeth.

Herod ben Mordecai smiled, his lower lip protruding as he thrust his head and shoulders forward to peer into Tros' face.

"Let us hope we are three friends!" he said significantly. "Shall I sit on that chair or on this one?"

He began to peer about the cabin, his bright eyes appraising everything. Tros sat down on his own oak chair with his back to the stern of the ship and Simon on his right. Herod ben Mordecai helped himself to the third chair, facing Simon, with his back toward the corner in which Chloe and Horatius Verres crouched in hiding.

"Where are the Lord Orwic and the man I sent with him?" Tros asked, looking straight at Simon.

Simon's face, majestic, heavy-browed and framed in a patriarchal beard, but sallow now from ill-health, wrinkled into a worried frown. Old before his time and physically weak from being too much waited on, he looked too strong-willed to yield to death and yet unable to enjoy the life he clung to. His clothes were wholly oriental, of embroidered camel hair, and there were far too many of them, making him look even fatter than he was. An eastern head-dress, bound on with a jewelled forehead band, concealed his baldness and increased his dignity; and he wore heavily jewelled rings on three of the fingers of each of his fat hands. He had kicked off his sandals when he entered and his fat feet, stockinged in white wool, were tucked up under him and hidden by the bulge of his prodigious stomach.

"I haven't seen them!" he said hoarsely, with a gesture of both hands that disclaimed all knowledge. He looked at Tros, not at the Jew who faced him, and he dropped no hint by word or gesture. Tros could not have told how the information was conveyed, but understood that Herod ben Mordecai was the man who could answer his question.

"Then how did you get my letter?" he asked.

"Herod ben Mordecai brought it," said Simon and drawing short, asthmatic breaths, he folded both hands on his stomach. Plainly there should be no secrets told in Herod's presence. Tros stared at Herod hard, but the old Jew's brilliant eyes met his without a quiver.

"How did you obtain my letter?" he demanded.

"My friend," Herod answered in an unexpectedly firm, business-like voice, "you are lucky it fell into my hands. I took it straight to Simon, who keeps his house like a castle. There are not so many who could get to Simon at such an hour and, believe me or not, there are fewer who would not have gone straight to the Romans with the news that Tros of Samothrace is so near Gades!"

"I asked you, how did you get the letter?" Tros insisted.

"I heard you. I didn't answer," said the Jew.

"Very well," said Tros, "you are my prisoner!"

He made no move. He simply kicked his scabbard to throw the sword-hilt forward, and sat still. The Jew looked keenly at him, thrusting out his lower lip again, and for a minute there was silence, only disturbed by Simon's heavy breathing. Then Herod leaned across the table toward Tros, thrusting forward one hand, fingers twitching.

"You should make a friend of me," he said excitedly, "for Simon's sake. Let Simon tell it."

Herod resettled himself, twitching at his curled black beard and showing yellow teeth. Simon sighed heavily.

"Tros!" he gasped suddenly, "Herod knows too much!"

"He's a prisoner! What he knows won't sink the ship!" Tros answered.

Herod leaned forward again, elbows on the table, lower lip protruding, eyes as hard and glittering as jet.

"But it will ruin Simon," he retorted in a level voice.

SIMON blurted out the facts, a list of them, while Herod tapped a finger on the table as if keeping check.

"I am in debt. Caius Julius Cæsar owes me three million sesterces, and won't pay. Balbus owes me a million, and I daren't ask him for it. If a word gets out in Gades against my credit, there will be a run on me. I lent my warehouse to conspirators for—"

Tros whistled softly.

"Which faction now?" he asked.

"Oi-yoi! Gades is full of factions!" Herod remarked, rubbing his hands as if washing them. He seemed amused.

"—for the storage of weapons, Simon went on. "They paid well. I needed—I need money. I didn't know those bales of merchandise were weapons until Herod spied on me and came and told me. Now, if Balbus learns of it, he will jump at the chance to seize my goods. He will tear up his own promises to pay. Cæsar's too for the sake of Cæsar's favor—and crucify me!"

"On a great—big—tree!" said Herod, laying both hands on his knees and smiling cruelly. "You would better tell Simon why you sent for him and make your proposal, whatever it is, and let us all three consider it. I am a man of business. Offer me business or my young men will be at Balbus' door at dawn. Before he has bathed himself he will have sent his guards to Simon's warehouse, where they will find the weapons in bales and bags and barrels.

Then a thousand slaves that Simon owns and his great house full of curios and his daughters' children—how many, Simon? How many daughters' children?—will all be sold. And Simon, well—he may escape on this ship. I don't know. But the two who went ashore tonight will remain in Gades, where they will suffer such tortures as only Balbus can imagine—rack, fire, spikes under the nails—"

"Tros!" Simon exclaimed wheezily, his nervousness increasing the effect of asthma. "We are old friends! You will not—"

"None knows what I won't do!" Tros interrupted, thumping his great fist down on the table. "My young friend Orwic and my servant Conops went ashore. If a hair of the head of either one is injured, this man—" he scowled and showed his teeth at Herod— "dies!"

"What if I don't know where they are?" said Herod, shrugging his shoulders impudently.

"So much the worse for you!"

"You heard me. Balbus will ruin Simon!" Herod insisted, thrusting out his lower lip again.

"We will cross the bridge of Simon when we reach it," Tros said grimly.

Herod showed anxiety at last. His eyes admitted he had overstepped his reach, grew shifty, glanced from one man to the other, rested at last on Tros' angry face.

"You're a fine friend, to talk of letting your friend Simon be sold up and crucified just for the sake of a Gaul and a Greek slave! Mind you, I can't stop it, not unless I go ashore. My young men know I went to Simon's house. They don't trust him—nah, nah! They don't trust him. They know what to do! Any of Simon's slaves might murder me, mightn't they? Any time. Dead men can't talk. So you see, if I don't return pretty soon from Simon's house, my young men will go straight to Balbus. I tell you, I can't stop it unless—"

"I'll drown you unless my men return!" Tros interrupted. "You may send a messenger ashore—"

"I'll go!" said Chloe's voice, and even Tros was startled. Simon nearly screamed.

She stepped out from the dark and Simon stared uncomfortably at her, looked like a man caught naked in the bath for all that he wore so many clothes and she so few. Herod ben Mordecai recovered from surprize and found speech first. He became all oily smiles, a mass of them, his very body writhed itself into a smile, and his lower lip grew pendulous like an elephant's.

"Ah, pretty Chloe! Clever Chloe! Who'd have thought of finding Chloe on the ship of Tros of Samothrace! Chloe and I are old friends, aren't we! Often I hired Chloe before she grew so famous and so expensive. Many a stroke of business Chloe had a hand in, eh, Chloe? Yeh-yeh. Chloe could tell who taught her how to turn a pretty profit now and then, eh, Chloe? Friendship, eh!"

He chuckled, as if remembering old mischief she and he had shared in, dug her in the ribs with his long forefinger, caught the edge of her damp chlamys, trying to pull her closer to him. She broke away, approached Simon from behind and stroked his forehead with her cool hands.

"Poor Simon!" she said merrily. "And he owes me two hundred thousand sesterces! Am I to lose it, Simon? And you so old! You'll never have time to grow rich again before you die, unless we help you! How shall we do it?"

Tros seemed to know. He reached for pen and ink and set them down in front of Herod. Then he clipped a scrap of parchment from a roll.

"Write!" he commanded. "To the people you refer to as your young men. Bid them release to Chloe, the slave of Pkauchios my two men from whom you took that letter. Add that secret business will detain you. They are not to be troubled on your account. They are not to go to Balbus."

Herod ben Mordecai shrugged up his shoulders almost to his ears, then shook his head.

"I won't!" he said. "Sometimes letters get into the wrong hands. And besides, I can't—I can't write."

Chloe chuckled. Tros reached into a locker behind his chair, chose a long knife, stuck it point first in the table, bent it back toward him and released it suddenly.

"You have until that stops quivering!" he remarked.

Herod began to write with great facility, using Aramaic characters. He covered both sides of the scrap of parchment and then signed his name. Tros scrutinized the writing carefully, then handed it to Simon for a second censorship before entrusting it to Chloe.

"There, you see, there. I have done

exactly what you say," said Herod. "I was only bargaining. We all have our own way of bargaining. You had the better of it. Now let's be friendly. I wouldn't have hurt Simon for—"

He wilted into silence under Tros' stare. He looked puzzled—seemed to wonder what mistake he might have made in judging character. Tros turned to Chloe.

"Understand me now, my two friends first! Go bring them here."

"Too late!" said Chloe. "I will have to hide them. Remember, I must go to Pkauchios and send him hurrying to Balbus with a reading of the stars!"

TROS nodded, chose a pearl out of the pocket in his belt, held it for a moment between thumb and finger in the lantern light, and tucked it away again. None but he and Chloe was aware of that sideplay.

"Hide them then. Bring them here as soon as possible. I want an interview with Balbus. Do you think your master could persuade him to come to my ship?"

Chloe shook her head violently.

"There have been too many plots against his life of late," she answered. "In some ways he is careless, in others he is like an old fox for caution. If you were an informer, if you had some tale to tell him about new conspiracies—"

Tros grinned. She had touched his genius. His hero was the great Odysseus, and he knew the Odyssey by heart. He could make up a tale on the spur of a moment to meet almost any contingency.

"Let your master tell Balbus that I bring him opportunity to be a greater man than Cæsar!" he said confidently. "Bid him tell Balbus to trust me, that he may stand in Cæsar's shoes."

She smiled, stared, smiled at him, her eyes astonished.

"Are you a seer?" she asked. "Those lion's eyes of yours—I—I—"

"Go do my bidding!" Tros said, gazing at her steadily. He realized he had aroused her superstition, and if superstition might assist the pearls to bind her in his service, he could play that game as well as any man.

He rose from his chair and took Herod ben Mordecai by the neck. The Jew clutched at his wrists and tried to struggle. Tros shook the senses nearly out of him and dragged him out on deck, where he called a Northman.

"Put this man below. Fasten him up in an empty water cask," he commanded. Then suddenly he thought of Horatius Verres and turned to Chloe. "Go fetch your Roman."

She led out Horatius Verres by the hand. They looked like handsome children in the darkness.

"Verres," said Tros, "here is work for you. Let me see you earn my favor. Go below. Stand guard over this Jew. See he doesn't escape from the cask and that none has word with him."

There was a smile on Verres' face as he followed the Northman. The fellow had the Roman military habit of obedience without remark. Tros decided he liked him. He turned to Sigurdsen.

"Put this woman ashore. Nay," he said, taking his cloak from her, "that stays here! You may have a blanket." He returned to the stateroom, took a blanket from his bunk and threw it over her. "Now, I will be in Gades harbor with the morning tide, ready for action. If Balbus is friendly, be you on the beach. If you are not there, I will send a threat to Balbus that unless the Lord Orwic and my man Conops are on board by noon, unharmed, I will burn all Roman shipping. I make no threats that I will not fulfill. For you, in that case, there will be no pearls, no freedom, no Horatius Verres, for I will sail away with him! So use brains and be swift."

Chloe went overside like a trained athlete, hardly touching the rope-ladder that Sigurdsen hung carefully in place. Tros watched the boat until it vanished in gloom at the edge of the path of moonlight, then returned to Simon in the state-room.

"Simon, old friend," he said, sitting down beside him, "in the fires of friendship men learn what they are and are not. I have learned this night that you are not so rich as I believed, nor yet so bold as you pretended. No, nor yet so wise as your repute. Tell me more of this Herod ben Mordecai."

Simon drooped his massive head in the humility of an oriental who acknowledges the justice of rebuke, and was silent for as long as sixty labored breaths. Then, wheezing, he revealed the sharp horns of his own dilemma.

"Tros, that Herod is a professional informer. Now he acts spy for the tax gatherers, now he betrays a conspiracy, now he plays pander to Balbus. Now he buys debts and enforces payment. Now he lays charges of treason, so that he may buy men's confiscated valuables at the price of trash. And he has found out what is true —that there are weapons in my warehouse!"

Tros thought for a minute, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"Simon," he said at last, "you are not such a fool as to have let that happen without your knowledge."

In silence Simon let the accusation go for granted. He stared at the table, avoiding Tros' eyes.

"Tros!" he said presently, hoarsely. "I am a Jew. I am not like these Romans who open their veins or stab themselves when their sins have found them out. Yet mine have found out me. I let myself be called the friend of Pkauchios, that cursed, black-souled dog of an Egyptian, a sorcerer! *Hey-yeh-yarrh!* It is the fault of all my race that we forever trust the magicians! We forsake the god of our forefathers. Too late, we find ourselves forsaken. *Adonai!* I am undone!"

"But I not!" Tros retorted. "I am not a Jew, so your god has no quarrel with me. Tell me more concerning Pkauchios."

"He has a hold on Balbus, through his sorceries. He knows that Balbus owes me a million sesterces. He knows I need the money. He knows Balbus would like to indict me for something or other in order to confiscate my wealth, such as it is—such as it is. I have a thousand slaves I can't sell, some millions I can't collect! Pkauchios plans an insurrection by the Spaniards, who will listen to any one because they groan under the Roman tyrrany. But forever they plot, do nothing and then accuse one another. I would have nothing to do with it. But Pkauchios knew of nowhere, except in my great warehouse, to conceal his weapons from the Roman spies. He offered me a price—a big, a very big price for the accommodation. And he threatened, if I should refuse, to whisper a false charge against me."

"And you were weak enough to yield to that?" Tros asked him, wondering.

"I grow old. I needed money. Tros, I had sent much money to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the Temple. *Aie-yaie*, but will it ever be rebuilt![*] Pkauchios swore that when Balbus is slain his debt to me shall be paid at once out of the treasury. I let him use my warehouse. And then Herod's spies! Ach-h-h! Herod came to me tonight with your letter in his hand. He would not say where or how he had obtained it. He said, 'What does Tros of Samothrace require of you? Tros is a pirate, proclaimed by Cæsar, as all know. There is a reward of three talents set on the head of Tros of Samothrace.' He offered to share the reward with me—two for him and one for me. He said, 'Let us tempt this fellow Tros ashore with promises. Let us tempt him into your house, Simon, and then send for Balbus.' And he made threats. He said, 'Balbus would be interested to learn where those weapons are hidden in barrels and bales and boxes!' So I came with him, bribing the guard at the gate. And Tros, I don't know what to say or what to do!"

SIMON bowed his head until it nearly touched the table, then rocked to and fro until the strong oak chair groaned under him. Tros closed his eyes in thought, and for a moment it appeared to him the cabin was repeopled. There were Fflur, Caswallon and the Druid, bidding him good-by. He could see Fflur's gray eyes. He could hear her voice— "Be bold, Lord Tros!" And then the Druid— "In the midst of danger thou shalt find the keys of safety!"

Tros leaned and patted Simon on the shoulder.

"What of Chloe?"

"A slave. A Gades dancing girl," said Simon with an air as if that was the worst that could be said of any one. "From earliest infancy they are trained in treachery as well as dancing. That one has been trained by Pkauchios, than whom there is no more black-souled devil out of hell! None in his senses trusts the dancing girls of Gades. Balbus, so they say, trusts Chloe. He is mad—as mad as I was when I trusted him and Cæsar with my money! Uh—uh! Trust no dancing girl."

"She seems to have trusted you with her money," Tros remarked.

"Aye, and shame is on me. I took her money at interest, even as I took yours. I can not repay her."

"But I think you shall!" said Tros, and

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[*] It was rebuilt several years later by Herod, the Great.

shut his eyes again to think. "You shall repay her and you shall repay me."

For a while there was silence, pulsed by Simon's heavy breathing and the lapping of light waves against the ship's hull.

"Simon!" Tros said at last. "I need the keys of Rome!"

"God knows I haven't them!" said Simon. "Until Crassus went to Syria I had a good, rich, powerful friend in Rome, but now no longer."

"But you have influence with Balbus since he owes you so much money?"

"Influence?" said Simon, sneering. "He invites me to his banquets, to over-eat and over-drink and watch the naked-bellied women dance. But I asked a favor only yesterday—only a little favor—leave to export a few hundred slaves to Rome. If they had been women he would have said yes, but he has placed an embargo on male slaves, to depress the local market so as to have cheap labor to rebuild Gades. He knows I have no female slaves, so it was no use lying to him. He answered, he would give permission gladly, only that Tros of Samothrace, the pirate proscribed by Cæsar, is at sea and might capture the whole consignment, for which he, Balbus, would be blamed. Bah! So much for my influence! He let Euripides, the Greek export a hundred women only last week, and that was since Cæsar's letter came. Pirates! What he fears is a rising market! He knows I need money. He knows I have a thousand Lusitanii that I bought for export. At his suggestion, too. I bought them at his suggestion! Tros, it costs money to feed a thousand slaves! That dog Balbus waits and smiles and speaks me fair and watches for the day when I must sell those slaves at auction, so that he may buy them dirt cheap for his labor gangs!"

"But you stand well with Cæsar," Tros suggested. "You say Cæsar owes you three million—"

"Phagh!" Simon's face grew apoplectically purple. "Cæsar is the greatest robber of them all!"

"But he has brains," Tros retorted. "Caius Julius Cæsar knows it is wiser to keep an old friend than to be forever hunting new ones. Why did you lend him the money?"

"Because his creditors were after him and he promised me his influence. Of what use to me now in Gades is Cæsar's influence in Gaul? Tell me that! I wrote to him for my money, for a little something on account. No answer! I suppose a secretary read the letter. Tschah! With Cæsar it is face to face that counts. Nothing matters to him then but the impression he makes on bystanders. Vain! He thinks himself a god! He acts a drama, with himself the hero of it. Approach him, flatter him, ask for what he owes you in the presence of a dozen people and he will pay if it takes the last coin in his treasury. Pay if he has to capture and sell sixty thousand slaves to reimburse himself! That was how he repaid Crassus. Sixty thousand Gauls he sold in one year! Tschah! With a smile he will pay, if he has an audience. With a smile and a gesture that calls attention to his magnanimity and modesty and sense of justice! But a letter, opened by his secretary, read to him, perhaps, in a tent at night, when his steward has told him of a nice, young, pretty matron washed and combed and waiting to be brought to him—Tshay-yeh-yeh! None but a Jew, but a Jew—would have let him have three million sesterces!"

Tros tried to appear sympathetic. He leaned out of his chair and patted Simon on the shoulder. But the news of Simon's difficulties only strengthened his own confidence. When he was sure that Simon was not looking, he permitted a great grin to spread over his face.

No Roman warships in the harbor, conspiracies ashore, Simon's warehouse full of weapons, between decks two hundred and fifty first class fighting men, demanding shore-leave and agreeable to act the rôle of slaves for the occasion, Balbus the Roman governor ambitious, greedy, superstitious and in the toils of an Egyptian sorcerer whose slave, Chloe, a favorite of Balbus, was in a mood to betray her master—it would be strange, it would be incredible, if the gods could not evolve out of all that mixed material an opportunity for Tros of Samothrace to use his wits!

"Simon!" he said. "Once you did my father a good turn in Alexandria. You did it without bargaining, without a price. I am my father's son. So I will help you, Simon. You shall pay your debts—"

"God send it!" Simon muttered.

"You shall be spared the shame of not repaying Chloe—"

"S-s-sheh-eh!" Simon drew in his breath as if something had stabbed him.

"We will both of us have our will of Balbus—"

"Uh-uh! He is all powerful in Gades. If they kill him, there will only be a worse one in his place!"

"You shall have your sesterces, and I, the key to Rome!"

"God send it! Eh, God send it!" Simon answered hopelessly. "But I think we shall all be crucified!"

"Not we!" Tros answered. "I have crucified a plan, that's all. A plan that can't be changed is like a fetter on a man's foot."

He arose and kicked out right and left by way of illustration that his brain was free to make the most of opportunity.

CHAPTER VII

THE COTTAGE IN PKAUCHIOS' GARDEN.

ORWIC and Conops lay flat on a tiled floor with leather thongs biting their wrists and ankles. Somebody had put the light out. The only sound was the quiet breathing of the Jews who squatted with their backs against the wall. Thought was tense, speculative, almost audible, but Conops was the first to speak in a whisper to Orwic:

"Roll toward me. I can move my fingers. Maybe I can untie your—"

A Jew leaned through the dark and struck him on the mouth with the end of a leather strap. After that there was silence again—so still that the rats came and the slow drip-drip of water somewhere up behind the gallery began to sound like hammer blows on an anvil.

After an interminable time the Jews began to talk in muttered undertones. Then a woman brought food to them. There was a reek of pickled fish and onions that they guzzled in the dark. Orwic took advantage of the noises to try to chafe the thongs that bound his wrists, rubbing them against the floor tiles. But a Jew heard the movement and struck him. After that there was silence again, until one of the Jews fell asleep and snored.

There was no way of judging the time, but no light shone yet through the shutter-chinks when a furious knocking began at the street door. It boomed hollow through the house and brought the Jews to their feet, whispering to each other. One of them leaned over Orwic to examine his thongs and another kicked Conops in the ribs by way of warning to be still. A woman leaned over the gallery and whispered excitedly. One of the Jews went out into the passage, lighted a lantern after a dozen nervous fumbles with the flint and steel and shouted angrily, but Conops, who knew many languages could not understand a word he said.

The knocking continued and grew louder, until the Jew with the lantern began talking to some one through a hole in the street door. He was answered by a woman's voice in Greek. She seemed to have no care for secrecy and Conops could hear her without the slightest effort.

"I say, admit me! Keep me waiting and I'll call the Romans! I tell you, I have a letter from Herod ben Mordecai! Open!"

The door opened. Several people entered. There was excited conversation in the passage. Up in the gallery the unseen Jewess fluttered like a frightened hen. The wooden railing creaked as she leaned over it to listen. Then the girl's voice in the passage again, loud and confident, speaking Greek:

"No use telling me lies! I know they're here! You've read Herod's letter, so out of my way!"

"Give me the letter then!"

"No!"

A scuffle, and then a girl in a damp Greek chlamys, with a thick blue blanket over that —and it surely never came from Spain—stood in the doorway, holding the Jew's lantern. Over her shoulders two male Numidian slaves peered curiously.

"So there they are! Untie them! If they're hurt, I'll speak to Balbus and have him crucify the lot of you!"

Conops cried out to her in Greek:

"Get me my knife, mistress! Then no need to crucify them!"

She laughed.

"I am Chloe," she said. "I come from—"

Suddenly she checked herself, remembering the Jews were listening.

"You will do exactly what I say!" she went on. "No fighting! They shall give you back everything they have taken from you. Then come with me."

She looked like a princess to Orwic, although the blanket puzzled him. It did not for a second occur to him that she might be some one's slave, although her sandals were covered with filth from the barren land outside the city and he might have known no woman of position would have walked at that hour of the night. Had she not slaves of her own, who obeyed her orders? Did the Jews not slink away from her like whipped curs? Was her manner not royal, bold, authoritative?

Her Numidians took the weapons off the table—they had none of their own—and cut the thongs that bound wrists and feet.

"Now count your money!" she said, pointing at the purse. So Conops shook out the money on the table.

"Ten gold coins missing!" he remarked, chafing his wrists, rubbing one ankle against the other. If he might not use his knife, he was determined that the Jews should pay in some way for the privilege of having put him and Orwic to indignity. Instantly he wished he had said twenty coins.

The woman in the gallery began to scream imprecations in a mixture of Greek, Aramaic and the local dialect, which itself was a blend of two or three tongues. Chloe silenced her with a threat to call the city guards.

"Who will take more than ten gold pieces," she remarked, "if I tell them I have authority from Balbus."

After a few moments, still noisily protesting, the woman threw ten coins down to the floor, one by one, and Conops gathered them, well paid for a night's imprisonment, but grinning at himself because he had not been smarter. Chloe took Orwic's hand and smiled to him, chafing his wrist between her palms.

"Are you ready? Will you come with me?" she asked engagingly in Gaulish.

Orwic would have gone with any one just then. To go with Chloe, after lying in that smelly room with hands and wrists tied, was such incredibly good fortune that he almost rubbed his eyes to find out whether he were dreaming. When she let go his hand he took his Roman sword from one of the Numidians and followed her into the passage; there he drew it to guard her back against the Jews, his head full of all sorts of flaming chivalry. She turned and whispered to him, raising her arms to draw his head close which, if he had thought of it, a princess hardly would have done on such scant acquaintance.

"You must walk through the streets with an arm around me," she said, using the Gaulish with a funny, foreign accent that thrilled him almost as much as her breath in his ear. "You must look like a Roman nobleman who has seduced a girl and takes her home with him. We must walk swiftly and then none will interfere with us."

She rearranged the blanket, throwing one end of it over her head, as a girl ashamed of prying eyes might do, and led the way into the street where she shrunk, as if she needed the protection, into Orwic's left arm, under his pallium.

"To the left!" she said. "Forward! Quickly!"

The Jews' door slammed behind them, and the procession at once became perfectly regular. Conops understood the game now. He walked in front, just close enough for Chloe to call directions to him, his long knife tapping on the scabbard as a warning to all and sundry to keep their distance. The two Numidians brought up the rear, striding as if they were owned by Balbus himself. Being slaves of a slave, they were much more harmless than they looked.

ORWIC'S Celtic diffidence prevented him from speaking. He was not exactly shy. He was ashamed of having failed Tros and of having to be rescued by a woman, half inclined to think the gods had personally had a hand in it, so sudden and mysterious the rescue had been, and not a little bewildered, besides thrilled. He hurried along in silence for ten minutes through a maze of winding alleys, thinking furiously before Chloe volunteered some information.

"I sent my two women to Pkauchios to warn him to be up and ready for us."

But ignorant of who Pkauchios might be, Orwic simply turned that over in his mind. Developments seemed more mysterious than ever. Chloe went on talking:

"Pkauchios may try to scare you with his magic, but remember what I tell you: his magic is all humbug. He gets most of his secret information from us girls."

"Us girls" did not sound like the words a princess would have used. Orwic's wits were returning.

"Who are you?" he asked, looking down at her, pulling aside a corner of the blanket so as to see her face. It was very dark; he had to bend his head, and at a street corner a drunken Roman stopped his litter to laugh raucously.

"Ho there, Licurgus Quintus!" he roared. "I recognize you! Where did you find that pretty piece you have under your pallium? Mark me, I'll tell Livia! I'll tell them all about it at the baths tomorrow! Ha-ha-hah! Licurgus Quintus walking, and a girl under his pallium at this hour of the night. Ha-ha-ha-hah!"

Four slaves bore the litter off into the darkness, with its owner's leg protruding through the panel at the side.

"That drunken fool is Nimius Severus," Chloe remarked. "He offered to buy me last week. Bah! He has nothing but an appetite and debts to feed it with!"

"Who are you?" Orwic asked again.

"Chloe, the slave of Pkauchios of Egypt. I am called the favorite of Gades. Soon you shall see me dance, and you will know why."

"Oh!" said Orwic.

He relapsed into a state of shame again, his very ears red at the thought of having mistaken a slave girl for a princess. Being British, he had totally un-Roman notions about conduct; it was the fact that he had made the mistake, not that she was a slave, that annoyed him. Chloe misinterpreted the change of mood, that was as perceptible as if he had pushed her away from him.

"I expect to be free before long," she remarked.

Suddenly it occurred to Orwic that the best thing he could do would be to head straight for the beach and swim to the ship if there should be no long-boat waiting.

"Tros—is Tros on the ship?" he demanded.

But Chloe guessed rightly this time, understood that in another second he would be out of her reach, going like wind downhill toward the city gate.

"No," she lied instantly. "Tros is with Pkauchios."

Orwic detected the lie. She realized it.

"Tros came in search of you," she added.

But by that time Orwic did not believe a word she said. It seemed to him he was escaping from one danger to be trapped a second time.

"How did you learn where I was?" he demanded.

"Tros told me."

They had halted and were standing in the moonlight face to face where they could see each other. Her clever eyes read his, and she realized she needed more than words to convince him.

"Tros paid me to come and rescue you," she went on, raising the edge of her chlamys, showing a yard of bare leg as she thrust her fingers into a tiny pocket. "Look, he gave me that to come and rescue you."

She showed him a pearl in the palm of her hand, and it was big enough to convince Orwic that it might be one of those pearls that the Druids had given to Tros. He decided to let her lead him farther but his normal mistrust of women, that Tros had encouraged by every possible means, increased tenfold.

"Though you hate me, you must walk as if you love me!" Chloe remarked, and he had to take her underneath his pallium again.

The stars were bright and it lacked at least an hour of dawn when they emerged into a rather wider street that led between extensive villas set in gardens. Trees leaned over the walls on either hand. Toward the end of the street there was a bronze gate set into a high wall over which a grove of cypresses loomed black against the sky; a panel in that gate slid back the moment Chloe whistled; a dark face eyed her through the hole, and instantly the gate swung wide on silent hinges. There was a sound of splashing fountains and an almost overwhelming scent of flowers. Tiles underfoot, but a shadow cast by the cypresses so deep that it was impossible to see a pace ahead.

Fifty yards away among the trees were lights that appeared to emerge between chinks of a shutter, but Chloe took Orwic's hand and led him in a different direction, through a shadowy maze of shrubs that murmured in the slight sea breeze, until they reached a cottage built of marble, before whose door a lantern hung from a curved bronze bracket.

Two Greek girls came to the door and greeted Chloe deferently. One of them behaved toward Conops as if he were a handsome Roman officer instead of the ugliest one-eyed, horny-handed Levantine sailor she had ever set eyes on. The Numidian slaves found weapons somewhere—took their stand outside the door on either side of it, with great curved swords unsheathed. Chloe nodded to them as she led the way in.

Orwic followed her because there was light inside and the place did not look like a trap or a prison, although the small, square windows were heavily barred. There was a fairly large room, beautifully furnished in a style so strange to his British notions that he felt again as if Chloe must be at least a princess. By the British firesides minstrels had always sung of princes and princesses in disguise who rescued people out of foul dungeons and conveyed them to bowers of beauty, where they married and lived happy ever after; and it is what the child is taught that the grown man thinks of first in strange surroundings. True, British slaves were very often treated like the members of a family, but he had never heard of a slave girl living in such luxury as this.

THERE was a second room curtained off from the first, and into that Chloe vanished, through curtains of glittering beads that jingled musically. One woman followed, and there were voices, laughter, splashing. Almost before Orwic had had time to let the other woman, on her knees before him, clean his sandals, and before Conops had done staring pop-eyed at the rugs and gilded couch, the little Greek bronze images of half a dozen gods, the curtains from Damascus and the pottery from Crete, Chloe stood rearrayed in front of them, fresh flowers in her hair, in gilded sandals, with a wide gold border on a snow-white chlamys. Over her shoulders was a shawl more beautiful than anything Orwic had ever seen.

"You, a slave?" he said, staring, wishing his own tunic was not soiled from the night's adventure.

Smiling at him merrily, she read and understood the chivalry that stirred him. Suddenly her face turned wistful, but she was careful not to let Conops see the changed expression. Levantines were experts in incredulity.

"Yes," she said, "but you can help me to be free. Will you wait here while I find the Lord Tros?"

She was gone before he could answer, closing the door but not locking it, as Orwic was quick to discover. He would have followed her to ask more questions, but the two Numidians prevented him politely enough but firmly, drawing no particular attention to the great curved swords they held. Staring at them, realizing they were slaves, Orwic decided that he and Conops could quite easily defeat them if necessity arose. Noticing there was no lock on the outside of the door, but only a slide-bolt on the inside, he returned to question the two women.

But they knew no Gaulish. One of them was fussing over Conops, putting up a brave pretense of being thrilled by his advances, which were seamanly of the harbor-front sort. Conops began to sing a song in Greek that all home-faring sailors heard along the wharves of Antioch, Joppa, Alexandria and wherever else the harpy women waited to deprive them of the coins earned in the teeth of Neptune's gales. It was not a civilized song, though it was old when Homer was a youth in Chios, and its words aimed at the core of primitive emotion.

To keep him entertained, the women danced for him when one of them had brought out wine from the inner room. And because the dance was not the bawdy entertainment of the beach-booths, but a sort of poetry of motion beyond Conops' ken, they kept him half excited and half mystified, thus manageable until Chloe came back, lithe and alert in the doorway, with a look of triumph in her eyes.

"Tros?" Orwic asked her instantly.

"He has gone with Pkauchios to Balbus' house," she answered.

But it was once more clear to Orwic she was lying. Tros, he knew, would never have gone away without first setting eyes on him, or, at any rate, without first sending him a message, if only a word or two of reassurance.

"What did he say?" he demanded.

"He was gone when I got to the house."

That, too, was a lie. She had been gone too long not to have talked with somebody; and there was a look of triumph in her eyes, that she was trying to conceal but could not.

"I, too, go to Balbus!" said Orwic. He gestured to Conops to follow, and strode for the door with his left hand on his sword-hilt.

Chloe slammed the door shut and stood defiant with her back against it.

"Prince of Britain!" she said, laughing, but her laugh was challenging and confident. "Be wise! All Gades would like Chloe for a friend! All Gades fears the name of Pkauchios! You are safe here. I have promised the Lord Tros no harm shall happen to you, and he holds my pledge."

Orwic sat down on the gilded couch to disarm her alertness. It offended his notions of chivalry to feel obliged to use force to a woman, but the mystery annoyed him more than the dilemma. It had begun to dawn on him that he was dealing with a girl whose instinct for intrigue prevented her from telling stark truth about anything. For a second, observing Conops' antics through the corner of his eye, he even thought of making love to her; but he was too much of an aristocrat for that thought to prevail; he would have felt ashamed to let Conops see him do it.

Above all else he felt stupid and embarrassed in the strange environment, aware that he would be as helpless as a child by daylight in the city streets. He had not even the remotest notion how a Roman would behave himself in Gades, and was sure the crowd would detect his foreign bearing in an instant. His Celtic diffidence and thin-skinned fear of being laughed at so oppressed him that he actually laughed at his own embarrassment.

"That is better!" said Chloe and sat down beside him.

But he noticed she had shot the door-bolt, and he did not doubt there was some trick to the thing that would baffle anybody in a hurry.

"Why do you keep on lying to me?" he demanded.

"Don't you know, all women lie?" she asked him. "We arrive at the truth by other means than by telling it. Prince of Britain, if I told you naked truth you would believe me mad, and you would act so madly there would be no saving you!"

Conops was becoming rougher and more like an animal every minute. Chloe's two slave-women were having all their work to keep out of his clutches, the one teasing while the other broke away, turn and turn. At last he seized one woman's wrist and twisted it. She screamed.

Chloe sprang to the rescue, broke a jar over Conops' head, and had his knife before he could turn to defend himself. He knew better than to try to snatch the knife back. His practised eye could tell that she could use it.

"Pardon, mistress!" he said civilly. "I was only playing with the girls."

Chloe tossed the knife into the air and caught it, noticing that both men wondered at her skill. She said something in Greek, too swift and subtle for Conops' marlinspike intelligence—more dull than usual just then from the effect of honied wine and an emotion stirred by dancing girls—then frowned, her mind searching for phrases in Gaulish.

"YOU CAN use weapons," she said, her gesture including both men. "I, too. The Armenian who trained me meant me for a female gladiator. But the ædile* to whom I was offered said it would be bad for Roman morals, so I was sold to Pkauchios. You are male and I female. What else is there that you are, and I not?"

Orwic smiled his way into her trap.

"Are you free?" he suggested. "I am a prince of Britain." He said it very courteously.

"Now! This morning!" she retorted. "How about tonight? My father and my mother were free citizens of Athens, if you know where that is. The Roman armies came. I was sold at my mother's breast. She died of lifting grape baskets in a Falernian vineyard, and I was sold again to the Armenian, whose trade was the invention of new orgies. But I was not quite like the ordinary run of slave girls, so I was spared a number of indignities for the sake of the high price I might bring. If the Armenian had not set such a high price on me, I think the aedile would not have talked so glibly about morals. Today I am a slave. Tonight I think I will be a freed woman; tomorrow, wholly free. And you? Does it occur to you, Prince of Britain, that there is none but I who can keep you from falling into Balbus' hands? Balbus would condemn you as an enemy of Rome. He would put you up at auction to the highest bidder. Why, you might be my slave in a week from now!"

She had his attention at any rate. He laughed and his hand went to his sword-hilt, but his eyes looked worried. Conops watched her with a gleam in his one, steely eye, his muscles tightening for a sudden leap at her; but she understood Conops perfectly and changed the long knife from her left hand to her right with a convincing flicker of the bright Damascus steel.

"You sit there and keep still!" she ordered him. "I am not concerned about you in the least. You may die if you wish! You," she said, looking at Orwic, "shall not be harmed if I can help it. You must make up your mind you will trust me, or else—"

"Why did you lie?" Orwic asked her.

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*Aedile. The elected Roman official responsible for the public games and the adornment of the city, which he had to provide largely at his own expense. Aedileship was a stepping stone to higher office. Aediles ran extravagantly into debt in the hope of reimbursing themselves if elected to a consulship.

She laughed.

"You are here. You are safe. If I had told you the Lord Tros was on his ship, would you have come with me?"

Orwic shrugged his shoulders. "Well, what next?" he asked.

"You must do exactly what I say. Pkauchios knows you are here. He has gone to Balbus to persuade him to let the Lord Tros anchor in the harbor unmolested."

"Could he prevent that?" Orwic asked, remembering Tros' great catapults and arrow-engines.

"And to persuade Balbus to invite Tros ashore for a conference under guarantee of protection. When Pkauchios returns, I will take you to him and leave you with him. I have told Pkauchios, and I will tell him again that you are a superstitious savage. Remember that. You are to agree to anything that Pkauchios proposes, no matter what it is."

"And you?"

"I go to Tros and perhaps also to Balbus. I take Conops with me because Tros, perhaps, might not believe me when I tell him you are unharmed, and I think the Lord Tros is not easy to manage. Also, Conops is a nuisance, who will get drunk presently, and there is no place to lock him up except in the ergastulum. And I can take Conops through the streets in daylight because he is a Greek who will arouse no comment."

"And if I refuse to trust you?" Orwic asked.

"I will have to lock you both in the ergastulum. It is not a pleasant place. It is dark in there, and dirty. There are insects. Listen!" she said, obviously making a concession to his prejudices.

A blind man could have guessed it went against the grain with her to lift a corner of the curtain of intrigue.

"You will spoil everything unless you obey me absolutely! Tros wants—I don't know what. But I will get it for him. I go presently to make sure that Balbus' promise of protection shall be worth more than the breath he breathes out when he makes it. Simon the Jew wants his money. Tros, I think, can get it for him. I want my freedom. Pkauchios, well, Pkauchios himself will tell you what he wants. Are you still afraid to trust me? Listen then. Tros holds a pledge of mine worth more to me than all the wealth of Gades. He keeps my lover on his ship!"

If Orwic had known more about the reputation of the Gades dancing girls, he would have mistrusted her the more for that admission. But she would not have made it to a man of more experience. She was as shrewd as he was innocent. Conops, cynically sneering, merely rallied Orwic's inborn chivalry:

"Huh! In Gades they change lovers just as often as the ships come in!"

Whatever she was or was not, Chloe looked virginal in that Greek chlamys with the plain gold border and the flowers in her hair. And whatever she felt or did not feel, she could act the very subtleties of an emotion instantly. She looked stung, baffled, conscious of the servitude that made her reputation any man's to sneer away, ashamed, albeit modest and aware of inner dignity. She blushed. Her eyes showed anger that she seemed to know was useless. Orwic passionately pitied her.

"You dog!" he snarled disgustedly through set teeth. "Go with her! Go back to Tros! And when I come, if I learn you have not treated her respectfully, I will have Tros tie you to the mast and flog you—as he did the rowers when they shamed those girls in Vectis!"

"Oh, never mind him," said Chloe. "He is only a sailor."

She hung her head, as Orwic believed, bashfully. But Conops understood right well it was to hide the flash of triumph in her eyes. She had Orwic where she wanted him. But what could a cynical seaman do or say, though he knew all ports and had been tangled in many snares of siren women, to convince a nobleman of Britain that a gesture and a glance were possibly play acting and not proof of honesty? Conops shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "I'll go with her to the ship. You stay here and run your own risks!"

CHAPTER VIII

GAIUS SUETONIUS

THE first rule of all crises being that no man behaves according to the law of averages, if there is one, or according to expectation or in keeping with the dignity of great events—which surely calls for a continuous procession of brass bands, torches, incense and acclamation—Tros and Simon slept. They snored, Tros forward on the table, Simon leaning sackwise backward in the chair. They were fast asleep at dawn when Sigurdsen appeared, enormous in the stateroom doorway, to announce the first glimpse of the sun.

"Tide in about an hour, Lord Tros!"

Simon snored on. Tros blew the air out of his lungs, filled them two or three times, felt by instinct for his sword, simultaneously glancing at the water-clocks, ran fingers through his long, black hair, looked curiously once or twice at Simon, nodded and knew his mind.

"Serve breakfast. Then out oars! Man arrow-engines, clear away the catapults, ammunition ready in the racks, deck crew at quarters. Then haul short. We enter Gades harbor when the tide makes."

The ship became a thing of ordered tumult, din succeeding din and a smell of hot smoked fish pervading. Simon awoke with a number of grunts and "ohs" and "ahs," remembered where he was and fell incontinently into panic.

"Tros! Tros!" he gasped. "We talked madness!"

"Aye, Simon, aye! The gods love madmen!"

"*Phagh!* You sicken me with talk of many gods! Why not have a row of smirking idols? Worship them! Such talk, such talk, and we, looking death in the face!"

"We will see Gades first and then look Balbus in the face!" Tros answered. "Simon—madder than the gods themselves and than the wind and waves, a man needs be who will risk his neck for friendship! Aye, mad enough to trespass in the porch of wisdom! Rot me reason and religion when the die is cast! Talk yesterday, act now, tomorrow shall say yea or nay to it!"

He laughed and went up on the poop to watch the ship made ready, washed down, cleared for action, ammunition set in racks and baskets, sand-boxes filled, pumps tested and the trained crews stationed each in its appointed place. Then he ordered one great purple sail spread as a tribute to his own pride, and started the drums and cymbals going to slow measure, that the oars might take up the strain on the anchor-cable.

He gave the helm to Sigurdsen and whistled to himself, striding from side to side of the broad poop to con the harbor entrance, pausing in his stride to listen when the Northman in the chains called out the soundings, memorizing landmarks, feeling as brave and careless as he looked in his gold-edged purple cloak. He wished there might be fifty thousand Romans on the beach to see his ship come in!

But the harbor, splendid with its thirty-mile circumference, looked strangely empty. There was one great trireme hauled out on the beach beside a row of sheds, and six ships that had wintered on the beach lay newly launched, high-sided, all in ballast. One long rakish craft was certainly from Delos, anchored apart from the others—probably a pirate captured by a Roman fleet and kept to be taken to Ostia and sold at auction. Vague objects fastened in her rigging looked suspiciously like the remains of human bodies crucified and picked to pieces by the sea-birds.

Fishing boats swarmed on the beach and at anchor nearer shore, and there were rows of sheds in straight lines at the seaward end of a narrow road that led from city wall to beach. The city gleamed white in the sun, but its high wall looked dirty and needed repair; outside the wall there were villages of shacks and shambles clustered close against it, and between them a tired looking grove of palm trees, surrounded a cluster of thatched booths.

Between city wall and harbor was a waste of common land, all swamp and rubbish heaps. The shore was piled with seaweed, rotten with the colors of decay and black with flies.

The principal signs of Roman rule were the villas of officials set in gardens near the summit of the slope on which the city stood and, on a hill to the north of the city, a military camp with regular lines of tents and huts and four straight, paved roads leading to it. The lower part of the city was a crowded jumble of mixed Carthaginian, Greek, Roman and primitive Spanish roofs.

Tros dropped anchor within catapult range of the hauled out trireme. That and the store-sheds were at his mercy, although the city itself was beyond reach of his flaming stink balls. Trembling, gnawing at a hot smoked herring, Simon came to the poop and pointed out the sheds where all the wine was stored for export to Alexandria in exchange for corn and onions.

"We'll save Pompey's people a few headaches by destroying that stuff unless Balbus comes to terms!" said Tros.

But there were already signs of Balbus.

A liburnian put out from a wharf near the store-sheds, leisurely rowed by slaves in clean white uniform. It had a bronze standard in the bow with the initials S. P. Q. R., and in the stern under an awning sat a Roman, dressed in the latest military fashion.

Simultaneously, another swifter boat, whose crew were not so neatly dressed nor nearly so in love with dignity, put out from a point much nearer to the ship and speeded at the rate of two to the liburnian's one. It had no awning. Chloe in the stern was plainly visible encouraging the rowers. Conops sat beside her.

The smaller, faster boat bumped alongside, reckless of Tros' vermilion paint, and Chloe came up the rope-ladder like an acrobat, bacchanalian with her wreath awry and her gilded sandals stained with harbor water.

"Lord Tros!" she exclaimed, breathless with excitement, "your great ship makes a braver spectacle than any Gades ever saw! I love it! We all love it! Look!"

She waved her hand toward the city wall whose summit was already black with people gazing. But Tros took more note of a hundred men who marched behind a mounted officer from the camp to the north of the city toward the shore.

"Orwic?" he demanded.

Conops answered him, climbing the poop steps sullenly with the air of a man expecting punishment:

"He lingers with the dancing women in a marble palace. Master, he refused to come away with me!"

CHLOE seized Tros' arm and began speaking in a hurry with excited emphasis.

"Trust me! Now trust me, Lord Tros! Your prince of Britain is absolutely safe! Look you! In that liburnian sits Gaius Suetonius. He is a youngster whom Cæsar sent to Balbus with a recommendation, a wastrel whom Cæsar wished to be rid of, but whom he did not care to offend because of his influence in Rome. Balbus makes a lot of him for Cæsar's sake, and also because they play into each other's hands to cheat the treasury. He comes with Balbus' permission to you to go ashore and talk with him! Now listen, listen, listen! Gaius Suetonius knows most of Balbus' secrets. Balbus would never dare to let him be—"

"I understand," Tros answered and strode to the break of the poop to summon men to stand by the ladder and salute the Roman.

He was just in time to provide a flourish of drums and trumpets and to rearrange his own purple cloak becomingly. Chloe vanished into the stateroom and Simon followed her.

The Roman approached the poop with the peculiar, half patronizing, noncommittal but amused air of the aristocratic Roman face to face with something new. The sun shone on his heavily embossed bronze body armor and his nodding crimson plume was nearly twice the regulation size. He was immaculate down to the tips of his fingernails, much too calculating, insolent and greedy looking to be handsome but possessed of strong, regular features and a muscularity not yet much softened by debauch. His richly decorated shield was borne behind him by a Greek slave, the impudence of whose stare was an exaggeration of his master's.

Tros eyed them sourly, but obliged himself to smile a little when the Roman condescendingly acknowledged the salute.

"You are Tros of Samothrace? I am Gaius Suetonius, master of the ceremonies and confidential agent of Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades."

Tros bowed suitable acknowledgment. The Roman turned himself at leisure to observe the arrow-engines and the crews at battle station by the catapults.

"What does this warlike preparation mean?" he asked.

"I am prepared!" Tros answered with a characteristic upward gesture of both hands. His left hand returned to his sword-hilt, whereat the Roman looked as if he had a bad smell under his nose.

"Prepared for what?"

"To receive your message and to answer hot or cold, whichever it calls for."

"You are insolent!"

"Balbus charged you with something definite to say. I listen," Tros remarked.

"You would have found it wiser to have been courteous to me!" said Gaius Suetonius angrily. "You will find insolence expensive!"

Tros took no notice whatever of that speech. He almost turned his back, which brought him face to face with Conops, standing by the poop rail. He made a gesture, unseen by the Roman. Conops vaulted to the deck and went forward without noticeable haste. The Roman turned as if about to go and spoke over his shoulder to add visible rudeness to his tone of cold contempt.

"Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor invites you to the courthouse at the morning session to confer with him. He promises immunity for the occasion."

"Wait!"

Tros' voice was like a thunder clap. It startled the Roman into facing about—suddenly, indignantly. So he did not notice the dozen Northmen whom Conops was shepherding one by one under the break of the poop. They came unostentatiously, but armed.

"Did Lucius Cornelius Balbus offer a guarantee?" Tros asked.

"You have his promise conveyed by me," Gaius Suetonius retorted, sneering. But Tros smiled.

"It appears to me he sent you as hostage!"

The Roman's jaw dropped.

"By Bacchus!" he exploded. "You will suffer for it if you try to make me prisoner! I represent the senate and the Roman people!"

"Aye, handsomely!" Tros answered, grinning. "I wouldn't spoil your finery! You and that slave of yours shall have snug quarters for a while, where he may keep your armor bright and you may tell him all about the senate and the Roman people. And lest he grow weary of listening and try to slay you with that sword, I will keep it well out of his reach!"

Tros held his hand out. The Roman's right hand went to his sword-hilt and his face turned crimson with anger; the slave behind him made haste to pass the shield, but Conops was too quick, struck the slave over the jugular and the shield went clattering to the deck. The Northmen swarmed on to the poop and the Roman saw himself surrounded.

"Dog of a pirate, you shall pay for this!" he snarled. He held his chin high, thrusting out his throat, but he drew his sword and gave it hilt-first into Tros' hand. Tros glanced at Conops.

"Into the forward deck-house with them! Lock them in. No other restraint as long as they behave themselves. Stand you on guard with as many Northmen as you need."

Gaius Suetonius strode forward fuming in the midst of his ax-armed escort. Tros could not resist a gibe at him.

"An omen! Lo, the Consul and his lictors! Is the foretaste of a consulship not worth the day's confinement, Gaius Suetonius?"

TROS went below into the stateroom, where Simon sat with his head between his hands refusing to listen to Chloe's optimistic reassurances. And after a short conference with Chloe he wrote a letter in Greek because, though he understood Latin well enough, he could write the Greek more elegantly.

> To the most noble and renowned Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades, Greeting from Tros of Samothrace, the Master of the Trireme *Liafail*, who cordially thanks you for your invitation to attend you at a session of the court.
>
> Your statesmanlike provision of a hostage in the person of the noble Gaius Suetonius removes all possible objection to my visit which, therefore, shall be made without delay, the more so since I appreciate the compliment of sending me as hostage one of such rank and so intimate in your secret counsels.
>
> The hostage shall be comfortably housed and safely guarded. He shall be released unharmed, with the dignities due to his rank immediately after my own safe return on board my ship.

That morning irony was running in Tros' veins. He felt an impulse to be mischievous. To use his own phrase, gods were whispering good jokes into his ear. A glance at Simon, shuddering with nervousness, and at Chloe, all smiles and excitement, confirmed his mood. He opened an iron chest and took from it the seal he had captured a year ago along with Cæsar's private papers.

It was of glass and of marvelous workmanship, done by a Greek—a portrait of Julius Cæsar naked, in the guise of the god Hermes with an elephant's head below it, by the hand of some other artist who had certainly never seen an elephant.*

Tros melted a mass of wax and affixed the impression of that well-known seal at the foot of the letter, which he placed in a silver tube, and went and tossed it to the men in the boat that had brought out Gaius Suetonius.

"To the Governor of Gades with all haste!" he commanded.

The boat backed away and made speed for the shore. Tros returned to the stateroom and sent for Sigurdsen and Conops.

"In my absence," he said, touching Sigurdsen's breast, "you are captain of the ship. The crew obeys you. But you obey Conops, who is my representative. I go ashore, and unless I return before dawn tomorrow you will put to sea after demolishing that trireme on the beach and all the stores and sheds. If I shall have been made prisoner, that hint will probably convince the Romans they would better release me. So you will keep in sight of the harbor mouth and hold speech with any boat the Romans send out. But you are not to surrender that hostage Gaius Suetonius except in exchange for me."

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*The elephant's head became the seal of all the Cæsars.

"Master, let me go with you!" urged Conops.

But there was no need for Chloe's warning frown; Tros had made up his mind.

"I can trust you afloat," he remarked. "Ashore you're too ready with your knife and a lot too fond of drink and women! Stand by the ship. You're in charge. Be careful of the prisoners."

Jaun Aksue came then, none too deferential, demanding information as to when the shore leave might be had.

"We Eskualdenak are fond of seeing promises performed," he remarked. "My men are boasting they could swim ashore. Can you suggest to me how to restrain them?"

"Yes," Tros answered gravely, "tell them I go to pay a visit to the Governor of Gades. I will seek permission for my best behaved men to go roistering. But have you seen those Balearic slingers on the beach. You know their reputation? They can hit a man's head with a slung stone at two hundred paces. None of you have weapons. And mark this: Balbus the Governor needs cheap slaves for his quarry gangs. I will make him a free present of as many of my men as those Balearic slingers stun with their stones and capture!"

"But your promise holds? We are to have our shore leave?"

"Certainly," said Tros, "but when it suits me and on condition you pretend you are my slaves."

Chloe listened to that conversation, her eyes intently studying Tros' face. She turned to him and touched his arm when Aksue swaggered forward to explain the situation to his men.

"Lord Tros!" she exclaimed. "You can make yourself master of Gades! I can show you how! Make use of Pkauchios until the moment when he—then—"

Tros gazed at her, his amber eyes admiring and yet smiling with a comprehension deeper than her own. It baffled her.

"What do you really seek in Gades?" she demanded.

He did not answer her for thirty seconds. Then:

"For a beginning, the Lord Orwic. Where is he?"

"In Pkauchios' house."

Tros nodded.

"You shall take me to Pkauchios."

His eyes did not leave her face. All sorts of probabilities were passing in review before his mind, not least of them that a Gades dancing girl would hardly carry all her eggs in one chance-offered basket. She would have alternatives that she could switch to at a moment's notice.

"You would better go down in the hold," he remarked, "and confer with Horatius Verres. Better ask him whether he won't change his mind and try his luck again ashore."

IT SEEMED to Tros that Chloe caught her breath, but she was so well trained in self-command that he could not be quite sure.

"I will go to him, I will warn him to stay where he is," she said, smiling, and was already on her way, but Tros detained her.

"Wait! He goes ashore now to take his chance in Gades unless you tell me who and what he is."

Chloe stared, at first impudently, then with wavering emotions. Her lips began to move as if in spite of her.

"Tros of Samothrace, you are a strong man, yet you are not a pig. You have not made love to me. I can trust you?"

"Yes," said Tros.

"If I tell you who Horatius Verres is—"

"I will keep it secret."

"He is Cæsar's spy!"

Tros did not move, although he shaped his lips as if to whistle.

"Cæsar spies on Balbus?"

Chloe nodded. Tros began to stroke his chin.

"Horatius Verres has sent his messenger to Gaul," said Chloe. "There is nothing further he can do until—"

Tros seized her shoulder.

"Until what?"

"Until Cæsar himself comes!"

"Spain is not Cæsar's province! Cæsar has Gaul. Pompey has Spain."

"I know it!"

"When does he come?"

"I don't know! Nobody knows! Horatius Verres doesn't know!"

"And Balbus?"

"No. He doesn't dream of it!"

"By land or sea?"

"None knows! Cæsar never tells what he will do."

"And Horatius Verres waits for him, eh? —on my ship!"

"Tros, Lord Tros, you promised—"

"Go and talk to your Verres. Tell him I know he is Cæsar's spy. Say I will not interfere with him."

"I will not! If I admitted I had told you, he would cease to love me. He would say I am a common Gades dancing girl."

"Tell him I guessed he is Cæsar's spy."

"He would never believe. He is too keen. He can read me like a writing."

"I have seen writings that deceived the reader," Tros remarked and stroked his chin again.

"Listen!" exclaimed Chloe. "Thus it happened: Cæsar sent a thousand Gauls to Gades to be shipped to Rome for sale for his private account. Balbus put them in the quarries, where the most part died for he did not feed them properly and there was a fever.* Cæsar, receiving no word of the arrival of his slaves in Ostia, sent Horatius Verres to find out about it. He spied and he discovered that Pkauchios, pretending to have read the stars, told Balbus he might safely keep the slaves because Cæsar will presently die."

"How did Verres discover that?" Tros asked.

"I told him! Pkauchios makes prophecies come true. You understand me? He sent his own men into Gaul to murder Cæsar. I knew all about it. I told Horatius Verres because he said he loves me, and I know that is the truth just as I know when an egg is fresh, just as I know I can trust you, Tros of Samothrace. But then I had to tell more, just as a witness has to when the torturers go to work. One piece of information led quite simply to the next. I told Horatius Verres how Pkauchios grew afraid that when Cæsar is slain Balbus might turn on him and have him crucified for the sake of appearances. There are always plots on foot in Gades, so Pkauchios joined a conspiracy to murder Balbus. He began by merely listening and giving his advice, but now he leads it. And I am afraid! I am afraid Balbus may discover everything and put me to the torture. That is why I want my freedom quickly, quickly, why I want to get away from Gades!"

"And Horatius Verres lies in hiding while all this is afoot?"

"He hides from Pkauchios. Somebody, I don't know who, warned Pkauchios, who put a dozen men to look for him and kill him. But he was hiding in the midst of danger, on the roof of the ergastulum.

"Hasn't he tried to warn Balbus?"

"He daren't. Besides, what does he care about Balbus? He is Cæsar's man."

"What do you mean by 'he daren't?' "

"Balbus would order his head cut off or have him stabbed or crucify him. As soon as Pkauchios learned there was a spy of Cæsar's in Gades, he pretended to read the stars and went to Balbus, saying there would come a Roman with a tale about conspiracies, but that the tale would be a lie and that the man's real purpose would be to get Balbus into difficulties with the Roman Senate."

"And Balbus believed that?" Tros whistled softly to himself. "And the Lord Orwic is with Pkauchios? And, why waits Pkauchios?" he demanded. "Why hasn't he slain Balbus?"

"He likes others to do that work," Chloe answered. "And the others are hard to bring up to the point. They are half mistrustful, and they fear the soldiers. It is always so in Gades—talk, talk, talk, and then some one at last dares it or else somebody betrays. There has been one betrayal already. Balbus has made some unimportant prisoners. But I think this time Pkauchios has his plans well laid and merely waits for the news of Cæsar's death. Then he will strike swiftly, and he thinks all Spain and Gaul will rise together and throw off the Roman yoke."

Tros laughed.

"Your Pkauchios can dream!" he said with irony. "When Gaul joins Spain against the Romans we may look for the Greek Kalends! Divide—*divide et impera!*† Go and talk to Horatius Verres in the hold. Reassure him and be swift about it. You shall take me to the courthouse to see Balbus, and thereafter to the house of Pkauchios."

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*Gades was always one of the unhealthiest places in Europe.

†"Divide and rule," the motto of the Roman Empire and the secret of its mastery.

She hesitated. There was indecision, terror in her eyes. Her muscles twitched at the thought of Roman torturers. Tros nodded to her confidently.

"You shall have your freedom and your pearls and your Horatius Verres before tomorrow's dawn!"

Chloe stared into his amber eyes, nodded to herself, and went down into the hold to do his bidding.

CHAPTER IX

PKAUCHIOS THE ASTROLOGER

CHLOE had pushed Orwic into a room in a marvelous marble house and left him face to face with Pkauchios, closing the curtains behind him on their noisy rings and rod. Orwic stared at the Egyptian, wondering at the severely splendid furnishings and at the quiet that was accented by lute strings strummed slowly in another room, suggesting the procession of the æons and the utter insignificance of days—months—years.

Pkauchios was dressed as an astrologer—a tall old man, immensely dignified, in flowing black robes and head-dress, with the asp of Egypt on his brow, to which Tros would have at once known he was not entitled. But Orwic knew nothing about Egypt. He had an hypnotic presence, and used his large eyes, as a swordsman should, directing his gaze not at the pupils of the man in front of him but a fraction of an inch lower, so producing the effect of an indomitable stare without wearying himself or giving his opponent a chance to retaliate.

He possessed almost the majesty of a Lord Druid, but that only served to remind Orwic of the Druids' warnings against magic. He had been educated by the Druids, and whatever else they taught, they were succinct and vehement in their instruction as to the danger of any contact with the black arts.

Bridling at the calculated silence, Orwic broke it, asking curt, blunt questions:

"You are Pkauchios? I am Orwic of Britain. You sent for me? You wish to speak to me? What do you wish to say?"

There was no answer, no acknowledgment. Sweet-scented incense of lign-aloes burned on a tripod-table, and its blue smoke curled around the Egyptian until, where he stood in shadow, he began to look unearthly, and the human skull on another table near his right hand appeared to make grimaces, mocking the short-lived dreams of men.

Orwic shrugged his shoulders and strolled to the open window. Down a vista between well tended garden shrubbery he could see Tros' ship at anchor, miles away. The sight encouraged him; he began to think of jumping through the window, measuring with his eyes the height of the wall at the end of the garden and calculating the distance to the beach. But the Egyptian spoke at last—

"Orwic, prince of Britain, fortune favors you!"

The voice was resonant, arresting, but the Gaulish words were ill pronounced. Orwic remembered Druids who had spoken in much the same terms more gently, and yet with infinitely greater majesty.

"I was born lucky," he answered over his shoulder, and then resumed his gaze out of the window.

"Look at me. Look into my eyes," said Pkauchios.

"I admire the view," said Orwic, and continued to admire it.

Pkauchios ignored the snub and went on speaking as if Orwic had obeyed him. He badly mispronounced the Gaulish, but his voice compelled attention, and he was fluent.

"I, who nightly read the stars, have read your destiny! I forewarned Balbus of the great ship with the golden serpent at her bow. The stars in their conjunction said that ship should—shall—must enter Gades harbor, and from out of her shall step one in whose hand is the destiny of Spain and Gaul. I said, because the constellations indicated, that the man will be a prince from a far country, bold in war, young, handsome, destined to be lost in Gades but to be recovered by a stranger. Last night I told Balbus that the prince in the ship with the purple sails will arrive before dawn."

"Well. Here I am, but it is not my ship," said Orwic, and began to whistle softly to himself. When he was a little boy the Druids told him that was the simplest means of avoiding a magician's snares.

But magicians are not easily rebuffed. The business of snaring men in nets made of imagination implies a thick skin and persistence, along with an immeasurable, cynical contempt for the prospective victim's powers of resistance.

"You are indeed the man the stars foretold," said Pkauchios with admiration in his voice. "Indifferent to flattery, not stirred by rumor, iron-willed! It is of such men that the Gods make weapons when the tyrannies shall fall! I see your aura—purple as the sails of yonder ship!"

He struck a bronze gong and the music in the next room ceased. The sound of the gong startled Orwic, for it resembled the clash of weapons. He turned suddenly to face the Egyptian, who was no longer standing but seated on a sort of throne, whose arms were the gilded tusks of elephants. There was a canopy above the throne that threw that corner into deeper shadow, and the Egyptian's eyes appeared to blaze as if there were fire in them. In his lap he held a crystal ball, which he raised in both hands when he was sure that Orwic's gaze was fixed on him.

"Approach me!" he commanded. "Nay, not too close, or your shadow dims the astral light!"

He was staring at the crystal, frowning heavily, brows raised, lips parted, eyes glaring. The effort he was making seemed to tax his powers almost beyond endurance.

"You are the man!" he said at last, and sighing, set the crystal down on the table where the skull stood. His eyes had lost their frenzy suddenly. He leaned back, looking deathly weary, all the lines and wrinkles on his dark face emphasized by pallor.

"You, who listen, never know what we, who look into the unseen, suffer for your sakes," he said.

Even his voice was aged. Orwic began to feel pity for him, and something akin to shame for his former rudeness.

Pkauchios left the throne and walking forward wearily took Orwic by the arm. His manner was of age that leaned on youth with perfect confidence.

"So, help me to that seat and sit beside me."

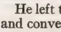
They sat down on a bench of carved ebony and Pkauchios leaned his back against the wall.

"Youth! Youth!" he said. "With all the world before you! Age must serve youth. We who have struggled and are old may justify ourselves if we can guide youth through the dangers. Age and responsibility! If I should guide you wrongly, what responsibility were mine! I will say nothing. It is wiser. I will not foreshadow destiny."

Now that was something like the Druids' way of viewing interference with a man's own privilege of living as he sees fit. Orwic began to feel a vague respect for the Egyptian and to wonder whether he had not misjudged him. He might, after all, be a seer. It was hardly reasonable to suppose that all the prophets were in Britain, Chloe had said. But was a slave girl's judgment of her master to be accepted without proof? However, Orwic was still cautious.

"I don't believe in magic," he remarked.

"Rightly! Rightly so!" said Pkauchios. "It is destruction. It will destroy the Romans. It has ruined nations without number. Fools, who know no better, call me a magician. When I tell the truth to them, they weary me with their demands for untruth. It is restful to meet you. Honest unbelief is sweeter to me than the dark credulity of those who seek nothing but their selfish ends. Your incredulity will melt. Their superstition toughens as it feeds on vice. But I must crave your pardon. I am a laggard host, forgetting the body's needs in the absorption of a spiritual moment. You are young, strong, hungry, I have no doubt."



HE CLAPPED his hands, and almost on the instant two slave girls appeared bearing trays heaped with refreshment. One of them washed Orwic's hands and combed his hair; the other spread before him milk, fruit, nuts, three sorts of bread, butter, honey and preserves, whose very scent excited appetite.

"I will return when you have refreshed yourself," said Pkauchios. "We who commune with the stars eat little earthly food."

He left the room, but the slave girls stayed and converted Orwic's first meal on foreign soil into an experience that melted his reserve.

He began by being half ashamed to eat while the Egyptian fasted, remembering that the Druids hardly ate at all during their periods of spiritual commune with the universe. He began to be almost sure that fasting was a sign of the Egyptian's purity of purpose. It was incredible that such food as the slave girls set before him should not tempt a man with wordly motives—such as Orwic's own, for instance.

He began to confess to himself that he was having a glorious time, and he hoped Tros would not come for him too soon. Deeply though he admired Tros, loyal though he felt toward him, he dreaded Tros' abrupt way of dispersing dreams and scattering side issues. He could imagine Tros' contempt, for instance, for the slave girls. Orwic liked them.

Used to slaves and serving-women in his own land, he had never dreamed of such attentions as these two dark-haired women lavished on him. They were beautiful, smiling, silent, exquisitely trained, but that was not the half of it. In Britain guests were made to feel that their comfort was the host's one sole consideration, and the servants vied with one another to that end. But these two slave girls made a man feel that he owned them, that their very souls were his, that they would think his thoughts if he would only deign to half express them, and be overjoyed to be the mothers of his sons.

It was bewildering at first, embarrassing; then gradually rather pleasant; presently as natural as if all other forms of hospitality were crude, uncivilized and no part of a nobleman's experience. This was the way to live. It was no wonder that foreigners regarded Britons as barbarians, with their crude ideas of courtesy and the servants' air of being members of the family instead of servants in the true sense of the word.

One of the girls was on his knee when Pkauchios returned. She was wiping his mouth and mustache with a napkin. She removed herself in no haste, unembarrassed, curtseying to her master, helping the other girl at once to carry out the tray and dishes. Pkauchios took no notice of either of them, which seemed to Orwic to prove that the man was an aristocrat, if nothing else.

"You are right, you are right," said Pkauchios, taking a seat beside him. "You should have nothing to do with magic. It is safer to avoid true revelation than to listen to the false. But tell me why you came to Gades."

Orwic told him all of it; told him the whole story of how Cæsar had invaded Britain and had been repulsed; and how Tros of Samothrace, for friendship and because his ship was built in Britain, had undertaken to go to Rome and by any means that should present themselves to deter Cæsar from invading a second time.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" said Pkauchios when the tale was done and Orwic had finished his eulogiums of Tros. "All this and more I have seen written in the stars. You are a man of destiny. And yet—"

He leaned into the corner, frowning. It appeared that the decision between right and wrong, between his own high standard of integrity and a convenient alternative was forming in his brain.

"—if I should tell you what else I have seen—"

"Oh, you may as well tell me," Orwic interrupted. "I am not a child. And besides, I will do nothing without consulting Tros."

"Do you not see," said Pkauchios, "that if Spain were to rebel against the Romans, Cæsar's army would be needed to prevent the Gauls from rising too?"

"Yes, that seems obvious," said Orwic. He was devoting at least half his attention to wondering where those slave girls were. The scent from the one who had sat on his knee still clung to his tunic. No British girls that he had known had ever smelled like that.

"And if Cæsar were to die," said Pkauchios.

He paused, aware that Orwic was only partly listening to him.

"And if Cæsar were to die," he repeated solemnly, then suddenly gripped Orwic's arm and leaning forward, fixing him with penetrating gaze, almost hissed the words:

"Do you not see that you and Tros of Samothrace, with Spain in red rebellion, north, south, east and west, could lead the insurrection into Gaul and stir the Gauls until they, too, rise against the Romans?"

He sat back again and sighed.

"All this," he said, "and more, I have seen written in the stars. Sight must be given us that we may see. And yet—"

"Such a deed would save Britain," remarked Orwic. He was thinking now.

He was still aware of the faint, delicious woman smell, but its effect on him was changing. There were thoughts of women whom a sword could win, quite other thoughts than Orwic was accustomed to, thoughts not exactly chivalrous but blended in with chivalry, suggesting that the rescue of the Gauls from Roman rule might lead to a delightful destiny. He began to wonder what Tros would have to say to the proposal and whether Tros, too, secretly, in the recesses of his heart, would not rather like the prospect of—well—of whatever victory might provide.

"I should not be surprized at anything," he said after a minute's pause. "When I left Britain it was to face my destiny, whatever it might be. Now that girl Chloe—is it true she is your slave?"

Pkauchios' answer was startling:

"Do you covet her? Shall I give her to you?"

IT WAS almost too startling; it rearoused suspicion. Orwic eyed the Egyptian narrowly, turning over in his mind vague notions as to how much Chloe might be worth. He was not so stupid as to believe that offer genuine.

"If you should do what the stars indicate you safely may do," Pkauchios said mysteriously, "then by tomorrow's dawn you will be all powerful in Gades. I shall need your friendship then. To flaming youth in the hour of victory, what gift could be more suitable than Chloe? I am an old man. Her beauty means nothing to me."

Orwic's veins began to boil, so, being British, he proceeded to look preternaturally wise.

"What is all this about destiny? What did you read in the stars?" he demanded.

"You would better not let me influence you," Pkauchios suggested. "I have never yet made one mistake in reading others' destiny, but I have no right!"

"Oh, nonsense! Out with it!" said Orwic. "If you can read my destiny, you have no right not to tell me."

"I must have your definite permission."

"You have it."

"Know then, that the stars have indicated for a month that this is the night when Balbus, Governor of Gades, dies! On this night, too, dies Cæsar, imperator of the Roman troops in Gaul! But the conjunction of the stars is such that, if the Governor of Gades dies by the hand of a common murderer, as may be, then anarchy will follow and no good come of it. But should he die by the hand of the prince who stepped out of the red ship and was lost in Gades, then the prince shall wear a red cloak and shall rule a province."

"Strange!" said Orwic. "Strange! I have had peculiar dreams of late."

"And how many men have you on board that ship?" asked Pkauchios. "If I should show you how to smuggle them ashore and where to hide them and how to reach Balbus' house unseen at midnight, and should tell you that in Balbus' treasury is money enough with which to recompense those men of yours and to pay others and to raise an army—"

"I am not a murderer. I am not a thief," said Orwic, his sense of self-restraint returning.

"Did you slay no Romans when they invaded Britain?" Pkauchios asked. "Did the Romans slay none of your friends? According to the stars that prince, who steps out of the red ship, is to be an avenger and shall drive the Romans out of Gaul!"

"Ah, now you are trying to persuade me," Orwic commented.

"Not I! But I will give you Chloe, if you seize your opportunity. She is the richest prize in Gades. She is worth two hundred thousand sesterces."

Orwic had not the slightest notion how much money that was, so he magnified it in his own mind, and the result rearoused his suspicion. He got up and began to pace the floor, to discover whether or not Pkauchios was proposing to detain him forcibly. But Pkauchios made no move; simply leaned against a corner of the wall and watched him. Orwic decided to probe deeper; he desired to justify temptation by proving to himself that Pkauchios was friend, not enemy. He drew back the curtains at the doorway by which he had entered the room. There was nobody there. He passed into a hall all lined with statuary, entered rooms that opened to the right and left of it, found nobody, and tried the house door. It was unlocked; doves were cooing in the garden; fountains splashed; there were no lurkers; only a few old Egyptian slaves who dipped out water from a well a hundred yards away.

Plainly, then, he was not a prisoner. And as he breathed the incense smoke out of his lungs, refilling them with blossom-scented air, he felt the challenge of his youth and strength.

"Off Vectis, the Lord Druid said," he muttered to himself, "there is a man in Gades to whom he could have sent Tros, only that Tros' mind was closed against him. This Pkauchios is probably the man!"

Musing to himself, his hands behind him, he returned along the hall toward the room where he had left the old Egyptian. Chloe had said he should agree to anything the Egyptian might propose. It might do no harm to pretend to agree. But he wondered how he should explain away his rudeness, how he should accept the man's proffered aid now without cheapening his own position and above all, how he should explain to Tros.

"You must help me to convince the Lord Tros," he began, reentering the room.

But Pkauchios was gone. There was no trace of him nor any answer, though he called his name a dozen times.

CHAPTER X

BALBUS QUI MURUM AEDIFICABIT

PONDERING the situation in all its bearings, Tros called Chloe back into the stateroom while the deck crew lowered Simon into the long-boat.

"Your Horatius Verres waits for Cæsar and is Cæsar's man. You have befriended Verres. Therefore Cæsar will befriend you. Why, then, should you be in haste to flee from Gades?"

"Torture!" she said and shuddered. "Horatius Verres sent a messenger who may reach Cæsar in time to warn him. But if Balbus dies and Cæsar comes, then Cæsar will investigate—"

"This is not his province. He has no authority in Spain."

"He is Cæsar," Chloe answered. "And I shall be tortured, because Pkauchios will certainly be found out and they will need my evidence against him."

"So, unless we save Balbus' life—"

Chloe looked into Tros' eyes. She laid the palms of her hands against his breast, her lip quivering for a second—on the verge of tears, but struggling to regain her self-control.

"Lord Tros," she said, "there isn't a slave in Gades but knows Cæsar would jump at an excuse to invade Pompey's province. Pompey and Cæsar pretend to be friends. They're as friendly as two lovers of one woman! Balbus is Pompey's nominee, and he is willing to win Gaul for Pompey or to betray Spain into Cæsar's hands, whichever of the two he thinks is stronger. All men know there will be war before long, and none can guess whether Pompey or Cæsar will win. Pompey is lazy, proud, rich, popular. Cæsar is energetic, loved, feared, hated, deep in debt."

"Wager your peculium on Cæsar!" Tros advised.

"Nay, on Horatius Verres! Have you ever loved a woman?" she asked.

Tros did not answer. He stroked his chin, watching her eyes. She asked him another question.

"Do you think it possible for me to tell the truth?"

He nodded. He expected a prodigious lie was coming. Her eyes were melting, soft, abrim with tears, held bravely back. The stage was all set for Gadean trickery. But she surprized him.

"I would die for Horatius Verres! I would submit to torture for him. But not for you, Pkauchios, Simon, Balbus, Cæsar nor any other man!"

"Pearls?" Tros asked her, studying her face.

She reached for the hem of her chlamys and produced the one pearl he had already given her, holding it out in the palm of her hand.

"You may keep them! Simon may keep my money unless you find a way of freeing me tonight! I will sing no more. I will dance no more and please none but myself. For they shall bury me where the other dead slaves' bodies rot if I lose Horatius Verres. Tros of Samothrace, if you have never loved a woman—"

"Come," said Tros.

The long-boat set them on the seaweed-littered beach, where an officer of Balearic slingers, aping Roman airs and very splendid in his clanking bronze, signed to Tros to pass on, but demanded to be told by what right Simon, the Jew, paid visits to a foreign ship in harbor. A party of Simon's slaves, with his great unwieldy, paneled litter in their midst had been detained some distance off, a detachment of slingers guarding them.

Simon began to argue excitedly, gesticulating, gasping as the nervousness increased his asthma. Chloe interrupted.

"Do you know me?" she asked.

"I pass you, exquisite Chloe!" the officer answered in Latin with an atrocious Balearic accent.

"I pass Simon!" she retorted. "Do you dare to prevent me?"

"But Chloe—"

"Bring me Simon's slaves or count me your enemy!" she interrupted.

With a half humorous grimace the officer beckoned to his men to let Simon's slaves advance.

"Remember me, O favorite of Fortune!" he said to Chloe. "My name is Metellus."

"I will mention you to Balbus. I will lie to him about your good looks and your loyalty," she promised, and motioned to Simon to climb into his litter.

"Be your memory as nimble as your wits and feet!" Metellus answered, shrugging his shoulders and signing to his men to let the party pass.

Those Balearic slingers lined along the beach were a godsend from Tros' point of view. There was a crowd of hucksters, pimps, idlers and loose women noisily protesting because the soldiers would not let them approach the shore. In the distance where the fishing boats were anchored three liburnians patrolled the waterfront and kept small boats from putting out. There was no chance of communication with the ship, no risk of the crew getting drunk or of Jaun Aksue and his Eskualdenak escaping.

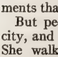
All the way to the city gate the road was lined with idlers who had come to stare and touts who heralded the fame of Gades' brothels. They praised Tros' purple cloak, admired his bulk and strength, flattered, coaxed and tried to tempt him with descriptions of alleged delights, pawing at him, pulling, fighting one another, spitting and cursing at Simon's slaves for thrusting the litter through their ranks. They offered horses, donkeys, mules, drink, women and at last a litter.

Tros hired the litter and bade Chloe climb into it and ride with him. But she refused.

"There are some things I can not do. Once I bought a litter. But it is against the law for slave or even for freed women. The Romans' wives threatened to have me whipped. So I walk, and those women envy me my health, if nothing else!"

They were stared at by the gate guards and by the crowd that swarmed there, but not in any way molested. There was no wheeled traffic, but the narrow street was choked with burdened slaves, mules, oxen and leisured pedestrians who flowed in a colorful hot stream between the lines of stalls and booths that backed against the houses. There was a din of chaffering and a drone of flies where the fruit- and meat- and fish-shops made splurges of raw color; and there was a stench of overcrowded tenements that made Tros cough and gasp.

But people were less curious inside the city, and Chloe's presence had more effect. She walked ahead with one of Simon's slaves on either side of her, and the crowd made way, occasionally cheering, calling compliments, addressing her by name as if she were a free celebrity. One man, forcing his way through the crowd, presented her with flowers and begged her to ride in his chariot if he should win next month's quadriga race in the arena.



SHE nodded gaily and led on along the winding street until it widened suddenly and approached an irregular square with trees along one side of it and a statue of Balbus the governor in the midst. On the left hand of the street, with its front toward the square, was a great white building with small, iron-barred windows and the legend S. P. Q. R. in enormous letters amid scroll work all along the coping. From the windows issued shrill, spasmodic, tortured woman's screams, increasing and increasing, until the street crowd set its teeth and some laughed nervously, then ceasing abruptly, only to begin again.

There was no passing at that point. The crowd jammed the street. Even Chloe was helpless to force a way through, and while she pushed, coaxed, pleaded, argued, a girl younger than herself rushed out of a doorway fighting frantically with the crowd that interfered with her and, falling to her knees, seized Chloe's legs.

Her face was half hidden in a shawl; Chloe pulled it back and recognized her. The girl sobbed, and as the screams from the window rose to a shrill, broken summit of inflicted agony, she burst into a torrent of stuttering words all choked with sobs, her fingers clutching Chloe's knees.

Tros rolled out of the litter, for it was useless to try to force that eight-manned object through the crowd. He touched Chloe's shoulder.

"Her mother!" she whispered. "Some informer has told Balbus of a plot. He takes her mother's testimony."

She stooped and kissed the girl, then

broke away from her and, beckoning to Tros to follow, began using violence and Balbus' name to force her way through, the crowd gradually yielding.

Around the corner, on the side of the building that faced the trees, eight Roman soldiers under a decurion leaned on spears beside the stone steps that led to a wide arched entrance. Beyond them, in the shadow of the wall, eight more legionaries stood guard over a group of miserable prisoners, gibing at them when they shuddered at the screams that could be heard there even more distinctly than in the street because the stone arch of the entrance magnified the noise. Held back by a rope between the steps and the trees at the back of the square was a crowd of Romans, Spaniards, Greeks, Moors, Jews, slaves and freemen, their voices making a sea of sound that paused regularly when the screams increased.

Chloe led Tros to the steps and whispered Balbus' name to the decurion in charge, who stared at Tros but nodded leave to enter. They fought their way into a crowded lobby, where men and women stood on tiptoe trying to see through the open courtroom door over the shoulders of two legionaries whose spears and broad backs blocked the way. There was hardly breathing room. A woman in a corner had fainted and a man was pouring water on her from a lion's mouth drinking fountain built into the wall.

Chloe kicked, shoved, imprecated, cried out Balbus' name and worked her way at last, with Tros behind her, until she touched the spears held horizontally across the door and Tros could see over her shoulder into the crowded courtroom.

The screams for the moment had ceased. On a sort of throne on a raised dais with a chair on either side of it on which the secretaries sat, was Balbus, governor of Gades, exquisitely groomed, pale, clicking at his front teeth with a thumbnail. He was handsome, but much darker than the average Roman;* there were rings under his eyes, that had a bored look, as if he found it difficult to concentrate on a subject that vaguely irritated him. His crisp black hair was turning gray, although he was a comparatively young man. He looked decidedly unhealthy.

Presently he sat bolt upright and the crowded courtroom grew utterly still. When he spoke his well trained voice had the suggestion of a sneer, and his frown was a tyrant's, impatient, exacting, final—like the corners of his mouth that tightened when his lips moved.

"I have considered the advocate's argument. It is true, it is a principle of Roman law that no injustice shall be done; but this woman is not a Roman citizen, nor is she the mother of more than one child, so she has no rights that are involved in this instance. Treason has been charged against the Senate and the Roman People, a most serious issue. This woman has refused to answer truthfully the questions put to her, although she has been accused of knowing the conspirators' names. We must have her testimony. Let the torturers continue. Apply fire."

He leaned forward, elbow on his knee, and again the awful screams began to fill the stone-roofed hall. A scream from the street reechoed them. The crowd on the wooden benches reached and craned to get a better view and the sentries in the doorway stood on tip-toe; all that Tros could see over their shoulders was a glimpse of the men who held the levers of a rack and the red glow of a charcoal brazier. There began to be a stench of burning flesh.

Chloe slipped under the spears of the sentries; one of them reached out an arm but recognized her as she turned to threaten him, grinned and nodded to her to go whereever she pleased. She disappeared into the crowd that stood in the aisle between the benches. The next Tros saw of her she was in front of the dais, looking up at Balbus, who sat motionless, chin on hand, elbow on knee, apparently not listening. The tortured woman's screams made whatever Chloe said inaudible to any one but Balbus and, perhaps, his secretaries, who, however, were at pains to appear busy with their tablets.

Balbus suddenly sat upright, raising his right hand.

"Cease!" he exclaimed in a bored voice. "There will be a short recession. Remove the witness. Let the doctor see to her. After the recession I will examine the other witnesses in turn. It is possible we may not need this one's testimony."

The witness' screams died to a sobbing moan, and there was a murmur in the courtroom. Some one cried out, "Favoritism!"

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*Balbus was born in Africa.

At the rear of the room there were audible snickers. Ushers and sentries roared for silence and, as two men carried the victim out on a stretcher through a side door, Balbus spoke with a metallic snarl:

"I will clear the court if there are further demonstrations! This is not a spectacle, but a judicial process. A courtroom is not an arena. Let decency attend the acts of justice. The next spectator who betrays disrespect for the dignity of Roman justice shall be soundly flogged!"

HE AROSE and left the courtroom by a door at the rear of the dais, nodding to Chloe as he went. She seized a court official by the arm and the crowd in the aisle made way in front of them. The official, lemon-faced, his skin a mass of wrinkles, sly-eyed from experience of litigation and his long nose looking capable of infinite suspicion, beckoned to Tros. The sentries let him through and the crowd in the courtroom turned to stare as he swaggered up the aisle, his sea legs giving him a roll that showed off his purple cloak and his great bulk to advantage. With his sword in its purple scabbard and the broad gold band that bound his heavy coils of black hair he looked like a king on a visit of state and, what was more to his purpose, he knew it. They passed the torture-implements, where a Sicilian slave on his knees blew at a charcoal brazier in preparation for the next unwilling witness; the long-nosed official opened the door at the rear of the dais and Chloe, all smiles and excitement, led the way in.

"The renowned and noble Tros of Samothrace!" she exclaimed, and shut the door behind her, leaning with her back against it.

Balbus looked up. He was sitting by the window of a square room lined with racks of parchments, holding toward the light a tablet, which he appeared to find immensely interesting. Tros approached him and bowed, hand on hilt.

"So you are that pirate?" said Balbus, looking keenly at him.

"That is Cæsar's view of it," Tros answered. "I had the great Pompeius' leave to come and go and to use all Roman ports, but Cæsar stole my father's ship and slew him."

"Why do you come to Gades?"

"To find a friend who shall make it safe for me to take my ship to Ostia, and there to leave the ship at anchor while I go to Rome."

"For what purpose?"

"To stir Cæsar's enemies against him; or, it may be, to persuade his friends of the unwisdom of his course. I hope to keep him from invading Britain."

"Who is this friend whom you propose to find in Gades?"

"Yourself, for all I know," said Tros, spreading his shoulders and smiling. "I offer *quid* for *quo*. A friend of mine may count on me for friendship."

Balbus was silent for a long time, appearing to be studying Tros' face, but there was a look behind his eyes as if he were revolving half a dozen issues in his mind.

"You took a hostage from me!" he said suddenly.

"Aye, and a good looking one!" Tros answered. "I was fortunate. You shall have him back when I leave Gades. I am told he knows your secrets."

"What if I hold you against him?" Balbus sneered; but he could not keep his eyes from glancing at Tros' sword.

Tros smiled at him.

"Why, in that case, my lieutenant would take my ship to Ostia. And I wonder whether that hostage, whom he will there surrender to the Romans, will keep your secrets as stoutly as the woman in the court just now kept hers!"

Balbus glared angrily, but Tros smiled back at him, his hand remaining on his sword-hilt.

"However, why do we talk of reprisals?" Tros went on after an awkward pause. Balbus, son of Balbus, is it wisdom to reject a friendship that the gods have brought you on the western wind?"

Balbus looked startled, but tried to conceal it. Chloe, her back to the door, took courage in her teeth and interrupted in a strained voice:

"What said Pkauchios? A red ship with a purple sail? A bold man in a purple cloak?"

"Peace, thou!" commanded Balbus, but in another second he was smiling at her. "Chloe," he said, "you dance for me tonight?"

She nodded.

"As long as Pkauchios owns me." Balbus stared at her, frowning:

"Pkauchios will never manumit you!" he said. "You know too many secrets."

Chloe bit her lip, as if she regretted having spoken, but her eyes were on Tros' face and appeared to be urging him to follow the cue she had given.

"Balbus, what if I should save your life?" Tros asked. "What then? Or shall I sail away and leave you?"

Again Chloe interrupted:

"Balbus! What said Pkauchios? What said the auguries? 'Death stalks you in the streets of Gades unless Fortune intervenes!' "

Balbus stared at Tros again.

"How come you to know about conspiracies in Gades?" he demanded.

"I, too, consult the auguries," said Tros. "For my ship's sake I read the stars as some men read a woman's eyes. The stars have blinked me into Gades. The very whales have beckoned me! My dreams for nine nights past in storms at sea have been of Gades and a man's life I shall save."

Balbus' lips opened a little and his lower jaw came slowly forward. He used his left hand for a shield against the sunlight streaming through the window and, leaning sidewise, peered at Tros again.

"You look like a blunt, honest seaman," he remarked, "save that you are dressed too handsomely and overbold!"

"My father was a prince of Samothrace," Tros answered; whereat Balbus shrugged his shoulders. It was no part of the policy of Roman governors to appear much thrilled by foreign titles of nobility.

NOW Tros was utterly perplexed what course to take, for which reason he was careful to look confident. He knew the information that he had from Chloe might be a network of lies. There might be no truth whatever, for instance, in her statement that Cæsar was on his way to Gades; on the other hand it might be true, and Balbus might be perfectly aware of it. Examining Balbus' eyes, he became sure of one thing—Balbus was no idealist; a mere suggestion of an altruistic aim would merely stir the man's suspicion.

"I come to fish in troubled waters," Tros remarked. "I seek advantage in your disadvantage."

Suddenly, as if some friendly god had whispered in his ear, he thought of the Balearic slingers on the beach and how readily their officer had yielded to Chloe's arrogant support of Simon. He remembered that shrug of the shoulders when she promised to praise him to Balbus.

"Are your troops dependable?" he asked, knowing that mutiny was as perennial as the seasons wherever Roman troops were kept too long in idleness. He began to wonder whether, perhaps, Balbus had not sent for Cæsar to help him out of an emergency. Secretaries, slaves might have spread such a rumor. Chloe might have magnified it and distorted it for reasons of her own; the Gades dancing girls, he knew, were capable of any intrigue. For that matter Horatius Verres might be Balbus' spy, not Cæsar's.

But Balbus' startled stare was more or less convincing. And it dawned on Tros that a Roman governor who felt entirely sure of his own authority would not yield so complacently to that hostage trick; a man with his nerve unshaken would have countered promptly by arresting Tros himself. Balbus was worried, nervous, trying to conceal the fact. Subduing irritation, he ignored Tros' question and retorted with another—

"You used Cæsar's seal! What do you know of Cæsar's movements?"

"None except Cæsar can guess what he will do next," Tros said, trying to suggest by his expression that he knew more than he proposed to tell.

"Word came," said Balbus, "that you fought a battle with his biremes. I have heard that the Druids of Gaul report to you all Cæsar's moves in advance. Can you tell me where he is now? If you tell the truth, I will do you any favor within my power."

The pupils of Tros' amber eyes contracted suddenly. His head jerked slightly in Chloe's direction and Balbus took the hint.

"Chloe," he said, "go you to that woman who was tortured. Help to bandage her. Condole with her. Try to persuade her to confess to you the names of the conspirators who are plotting against my life. Tell her that if she confesses she shall not be tortured any more, and she may save others from the rack."

Chloe left the room, and Tros did not care to turn his head to see what effect the dismissal had on her.

"Now, what do you know of Cæsar?" Balbus asked.

Tros smiled. He was determined not to

answer until sure of where the forks of Balbus' own dilemma pricked. And the longer Tros hesitated the more confident Balbus grew that Tros knew more than he would tell without persuasion.

"You are Cæsar's enemy?" he asked.

Tros nodded.

"I am of the party of Pompeius Magnus," Balbus remarked, narrowing his eyes.

Tros nodded again.

"It would not offend Pompeius Magnus if—ah—if death should overtake Cæsar," Balbus remarked, and looked the other way.

"So I should imagine," Tros said, watching him.

Balbus stroked his chin. It had been beautifully shaven. Tros kept silence. Balbus had to resume the conversation:

"If Cæsar should visit Gades and should die, all Rome would sigh with relief; but the Senate would assert its own dignity by crucifying any Roman who had killed him. You understand me?"

Again Tros nodded. He was having hard work to suppress excitement, but his breath came regularly, slowly. Even his hand on the jeweled sword-hilt rested easily. Balbus appeared irritated at his calmness. He spoke sharply—

"But if an enemy of Cæsar slew him—" Tros stroked his chin, passing the hand over his mouth to hide a smile—"that man would have a thousand friends in Rome!" Balbus went on. Then, after a moment's pause, his eyes on Tros, "Cæsar's corpse could harm no friends of yours in Britain!"

For as long as thirty breaths Tros and Balbus eyed each other. Then:

"Spies have informed me," said Balbus, "of a rumor that Cæsar intends to come here. What else than that news brought you into Gades? Did you not come to waylay and kill him?"

Tros, stroking at his chin again, assumed the slyest possible expression.

"I should need such guarantees of safety and immunity as even Balbus might find it hard to give," he remarked.

"We can discuss that later on," said Balbus. "Cæsar moves swiftly and secretly, but I know where he was three days ago. He can not be here for four or five days yet. We have time."

However, Tros remembered his friend Simon—probably already home by now and in abject terror awaiting news of the interview. Also he thought of Chloe. Those were two whose loyalty he needed to bind to himself, by all means and as soon as possible.

"I will make a first condition now," he said abruptly. "Simon, the Jew owes money but can not pay. He says you owe him money and will not pay. Will you settle with Simon?"

Balbus looked exasperated.

"Bacchus!" he swore under his breath.

It needed small imagination to explain what situation he was in. Like any other Roman governor, he had been forced to send enormous sums to Rome to defray his own debts and to bribe the professional blackmailers who lived by accusing absentees before the Senate. He had not been long enough in Gades to accumulate reserves of extorted coin.

Tros understood the situation perfectly. He also knew how men in debt snatch eagerly at temporary respite.

"There is no haste for the money," he remarked. "Let Simon write an order on your treasury which you accept for payment, say, in six months' time."

Balbus nodded.

"That would be an unusual concession," he said, "from a man in my position. But I see no serious objection."

"Would any one in Gades dare to refuse to accept such a document in payment of a debt?" Tros asked him.

Balbus stiffened, instantly assertive of his dignity.

"Some men will dare almost anything—once!" he remarked. "It would be a dangerous indiscretion!"

"Even if it were the price of the manumission of a slave?"

"Even so."

"Very well," said Tros. "There is a female slave in Gades whom I covet. Can you order the sale of that slave to me?"

"Not so," said Balbus. "But I can order the slave manumitted at the price at which the owner has declared that slave for taxation purposes, and provided the slave pays the manumission tax of ten per cent. on her market value."

"I am at the age when a woman means more to me than money," Tros remarked.

Balbus nodded. That was no new thing. The dry smile on his face revealed that he thought he had Tros in the hollow of his hand.

"But how did you make the acquaintance

of this slave in Gades?" he asked curiously.

Tros could lie on the spur of a moment as adroitly as he could change his ship's helm to defeat the freaks of an Atlantic wind.

"She was sold under my eyes in Greece, two years ago. I was outbidden," he answered promptly. "I learned she was brought to Gades and, if you must know, that is why I risked coming here. She is extremely beautiful. I saw her just now in the street."

"Do you know who owns her?"

"I will find out."

"Well," said Balbus, "make your inquiries cautiously, or her owner may grow suspicious and spirit her out of sight. You would better get her name and legal description, her owner's name and her taxable value, have the document drawn and bring it to me to sign before the owner learns anything about it."

"When? Where?" Tros asked him.

Balbus turned in his chair suddenly and looked straight into Tros' face, staring long and keenly at him.

"At my house. Tonight," he said deliberately, using the words with emphasis, as a man might who was naming an enormous stake in a game of chance. "I bid you to my house to supper at one hour after sunset. There is an Egyptian named Pkauchios in Gades, an astrologer of great ability in the prediction of events. For two months he has predicted daily that Cæsar will die very soon by violence. Last night, between midnight and the dawn, he came to me predicting your arrival after sunrise. He prophesied that you shall serve me in a matter of life and death. I am thinking, if it should be my life and the death of Cæsar—"

"I must consult this Pkauchios!" said Tros, and Balbus nodded.

"I will send you to him."

"No," said Tros, "for then he will know I come from you. And if he has lied to you, he will lie to me. But if I go alone I may get the truth from him. I will not slay Cæsar unless I know the elements are all propitious."

"Go to him then," Balbus answered. "Make yourself as inconspicuous in Gades as you can. Bring me an exact account tonight of all that Pkauchios has said to you. I will sign the order for Simon's money and for the manumission of that slave girl just to let you feel my generosity. Thereafter, we will discuss the terms on which you shall—ah—shall—ah—act as the instrument of fate."

CHAPTER XI

CONSPIRACY

THE LITTER Tros had hired had vanished when he left the courtroom. In its place was a sumptuous thing with gilded pomegranates at the corners of the curtained awning, borne by eight slaves in clean white uniform. An Alexandrian eunuch, who seemed to have enough authority to keep the crowd at bay, came forward, staff in hand, to greet Tros at the courthouse steps.

"My master the noble Pkauchios invites you," he said, bowing, gesturing toward the litter.

"Where is my own litter?" Tros demanded.

The eunuch smiled, bowing even more profoundly.

"My master would be ashamed that you should ride in such a hired thing to his house. I took the liberty in his name of dismissing it and paying the trifling charges."

Tros hesitated. He would have preferred to go first to Simon's house, supposing that the Jew had hurried home to wait for him, but as he glanced to left and right in search of Simon's litter the eunuch interpreted that thought.

"Simon the Jew is also my master's guest," he announced.

Tros disbelieved that. It was incredible that Simon should accept hospitality from a man whom he had so recently described as a vile magician. But the decurion in charge of the soldiers at the courthouse entrance nodded confirmation:

"Simon went to have his fatness charmed away," he suggested with a grin. "Pkauchios has a name for working miracles."

Reflecting that in any event he had better see Orwic as soon as possible, Tros rolled into the splendid litter. There was no sign of Chloe and he did not care to arouse comment by asking for her. He was borne away in haste, the soldiers shouting to the crowd to make way for the litter and, after a long ride through well swept but fetid smelling streets, he was set down at Pkauchios' front gate, where the eunuch ushered him into the marble house, not announcing him, not entering the incense smelling room with him, but drawing back the clashing curtains, motioning him through and closing them behind him.

He was greeted by Orwic's boyish laugh and by a gasp from Simon. The two were seated face to face on couches near the window, unable to converse since Simon knew hardly any Gaulish, and both of them as pleased to see Tros as if he were a meal produced by a miracle for hungry men. Orwic ran to greet him, threw an arm around him, trying to say everything at once in an excited whisper:

"A great wizard. This must be the man our Lord Druid might have sent you to if you had only listened—made me a proposal—slip the Eskualdenak ashore—he says he knows how to manage that—hide them in a place he'll show me—kill Balbus tonight—lead an uprising against the Romans—carry the rebellion into Gaul—no need then to go to Rome—we'll keep the Romans' hands too full to invade Britain!"

Tros snorted. One sniff was enough. There was a woman smell on Orwic's clothes.

"Magic works many ways," he remarked, and then thought of the curtains behind him. "We will consider the proposal," he added in a somewhat louder voice.

He approached Simon, who appeared too exhausted to rise from the couch and, glimpsing through the open window his great ship at anchor in the distance, he paused a moment, thrilled by the sight, before he spoke in Aramaic, his lips hardly moving, in an undertone that Orwic hardly caught:

"Out of the teeth of danger we will snatch success, but you must trust me. We speak now for an unseen audience."

He could feel the espionage, although there was no sign of it. He leaned through the open window, but no eavesdroppers lurked within earshot. He strode back to the curtains through which he had entered, jerked them back suddenly, and found the hall empty. There was another door a few feet from the throne with the arms of gilded ivory. He jerked back its curtains, too, and found the next room vacant, silent, beautifully furnished but affording no hiding place. There was a lute left lying by a gilded chair and the same smell of scented women that he had noticed on Orwic's clothes, but the wearers of the scent had vanished.

Nevertheless, he was convinced he was being spied on. He could feel the nervous tension that an unseen eye produces, and he suspected the wall at the back of the ivory throne might be hollow; the corner behind the throne was not square but built out, forming two angles and a short, flat wall. The canopy over the throne cast shadow, and there was a deal of decoration there that might conceal a peep-hole. He signed to Orwic to sit down by the window and, standing so that his voice might carry straight toward that corner wall, himself full in the sunlight, stroking his chin with an air of great deliberation, he spoke in Gaulish:

"It is good that we may speak among ourselves before the Egyptian comes. What kind of man is he?"

"A nobleman!" said Orwic. "A good hater of the Romans! It was his slaves who rescued me from some ruffians in a mean street. He is not a false magician but a true one. He had prophesied the coming of your ship, and my landing at night and being lost in Gades. He has read our destiny in the stars and he refused, like a true magician, to say a word about it until I almost forced it out of him."

Tros nodded gravely.

"Then he made me that proposal. And I tell you, Tros, you would do well to consider it."

"I am an opportunist," Tros said. "I will do whatever fortune indicates."

"I objected to murdering Balbus," Orwic went on, "but the Romans invaded Britain. They killed our men. And he said Balbus is doomed anyhow but, according to his reading of the stars, if he should be killed by the prince from a far country who steps out of the ship with the purple sails, it will mean the end of Roman rule in all Spain and Gaul. Whereas, if he is killed by a common murderer, no good will come of it."

Tros stroked his chin and frowned. No trace of incredulity betrayed itself as he answered solemnly—

"Few men can read the stars with such precision."

"That is exactly my opinion," Orwic agreed. "He speaks like a Lord Druid."

Simon had made very little of the conversation, but he was watching Tros' face with a sort of blank expression on his own, as if his intuition rather than his ordinary faculties were working. He had suppressed his noisy breathing.

"Get me my money, Tros! Get me my money!" he gasped suddenly, noisily in Aramaic.

But his expression had changed and his eyes were brighter; Tros interpreted the remark to mean that Simon could see light at last. He answered him in Greek, speaking very loudly.

"I will put the illustrious Pkauchios to a test, as a man throws dice to solve a difficult decision. For I think that in such ways the gods are willing to indicate a proper course to us in our perplexity. If he shall grant me the first favor that I ask and faithfully perform it, then I will let him guide me in this matter. But if he shall quibble with me or refuse or, having promised, fail to do what I shall ask, then no. So, let the gods decide!"

HE MADE a gesture as of throwing dice and turned his back to the window, striding the length of the room with measured steps. He had paced the room three times before he saw Pkauchios standing in the doorway, not the doorway near the throne—the other one.

"I welcome you. Peace to you!" said Pkauchios in Greek. "But I foresee that you must snatch peace from the fangs of war!"

"I thank you for your courtesy," Tros answered, bowing.

He did not bow so deeply that his eyes left Pkauchios' face. He hated the man instantly, and hid the hatred under a mask of eager curiosity.

The magician's dark eyes seemed to be trying to read into his very soul, but Tros knew nothing better than that men of genuine spiritual power are careful never to display the outward signs of it and, above all, never to distress strangers with a penetrating stare. The astrologer's robes and the air of superhuman wisdom were convincing, but not of what Pkauchios intended. The Egyptian spoke again pleasantly, with the air of a wiseman condescending:

"I regret I should have kept you waiting, but I observed the flight of birds, from which much may be foretold by those who understand natural symbology. Why do you come to Gades?"

"You are a magician. You should know why I came," Tros answered.

"And indeed I do know. But I see there is a question in your mind," said Pkauchios.

The pupils of the Egyptian's eyes contracted into bright dots. He made a gesture with his hand before his eyes, brushing away veils of immaterial obscurity.

"Doubt? Or desire? One blended with the other, or so it seems. You have a request to make," he went on. "Speak then, while the vision holds me."

He had not moved. He was standing before the curtains like a dignified attendant at the door of mystery.

"There is a slave," said Tros, "who at great risk brought me information. Speak for me to Balbus that he manumit that slave."

"I will," said Pkauchios, without a second's hesitation. "Whose is the slave?"

"Do you or do you not see that the slave should be set free?" Tros countered.

"I see it is just and can be accomplished. But how shall I urge Balbus unless I know the slave's name and his master's?" Pkauchios answered.

"Speak to him thus—" said Tros. "'It would be well if you should order manumitted whichever slave Tros the Samothracian indicates.'"

"It shall be done," said Pkauchios. But he did not quite retain his self-command. There was a twitching of the face muscles, a discernible effort to conceal chagrin.

Tros did not dare to glance at Simon or at Orwic. He was so sure now that the Egyptian had been spying through an eye-hole in the wall behind the throne, that he would have burst out laughing if he had not bowed again and backed away, biting his lower lip until the blood came. That gave him an excuse to break the tension.

"Blood?" he exclaimed, frowning, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and examining it.

"Aye, blood!" said Pkauchios in a hollow voice and walked in front of him to near where Orwic sat.

By the window he turned and, after greeting Simon with a stare and a gesture of condescension, spoke again:

"Blood! Mars with Saturn in conjunction! And a red ship on the morning tide! The blood must flow in rivers-full! But whose?"

He stared at Simon balefully until the Jew in nervous resentment gaped at him and tried to force himself to speak, but failed because the asthma gripped his throat.

"I know your danger!" Pkauchios remarked. "There are weapons in your warehouse—"

"Yours!" Simon interrupted, pointing a fat finger at him. "You—"

The Egyptian cut him short.

"Jew! Have a care! You come to me for help, not for recrimination. At a word from me you would be tortured with the rack and charcoal. Rob not opportunity!"

Tros kept staring through the window at his great ship in the distance. She summoned to the surface all the mysticism in him and he muttered lines from Homer as he gazed. The blind poet who once dwelt on rocky Chios, when he stamped on to the racial memory that character of crafty, bold Odysseus, hymned a hero after Tros' own heart. The Egyptian seemed to read the tenor of his thought.

"Tros of Samothrace," he said, turning his back on Simon, "you have impelled yourself into a vortex of events. You—your ship—your friends—your crew—are all in danger. Win or lose all! Forward lies the only road to safety!"

"It appears you have a plan," said Tros. "Unfold it."

The Egyptian nodded.

"We are few who can interpret destiny, but to us is always given means with which to guide events. I have awaited you these many days."

"I am here," said Tros.

"And you have men with you! You will sup tonight with Balbus; that I know, for I advised him to invite you. Listen. There is a quarry close to Balbus' house where you can hide your men. There is a wall between the quarry and the house, where no guards are ever posted. It is easy to scale that wall from the side of the quarry. It is simple to bring unarmed slaves into the city. It is easy to bribe Balearic slingers to see and to say nothing after darkness has set in. There are weapons in Simon's warehouse. There is only a small guard at Balbus' house at night—not more than twenty or thirty men. You have, I think, two hundred and fifty men who could hide in the quarry and at a signal overwhelm the guard."

Simon was growing restless, trying to catch Tros' eye and warn him against being caught in any such network of intrigue, but Tros trod on his foot to signal to him to keep still. Orwic, who knew no Greek, was walking about the room examining strange ornaments. The Egyptian after a pause continued:

"Balbus, who envies Cæsar, has sent emissaries into Gaul to murder him! Hourly he awaits the news of Cæsar's death! The stars, whose symbolism never lies, inform me that Cæsar is already dead, and the news will reach Gades tonight! But if Balbus lives, he will blame others for the murdering of Cæsar. Therefore, Balbus shall die, too!"

Tros nodded. Not a gesture, not a line of his face suggested that he knew it was the Egyptian himself had sent slaves to murder Cæsar. His lion's eyes were glowing with what might have been enthusiasm. He stood, hands clenched behind him, making no audible comment.

"It is expedient that Balbus dies tonight in any case," said Pkauchios. "He has received word of a conspiracy against him. Sooner or later a witness in the agony of torture will reveal names. The conspirators are fearful; they lack leadership. But if Balbus were slain, the whole city would rise in rebellion! I have a plan that at the proper moment will draw away the legionaries from the camp outside the city."

He paused, and then dramatically raised his voice:

"By morning messengers will have gone forth summoning all Spain to rise. Good leadership and I, Pkauchios, will guide you, Tros of Samothrace. Good, ruthless leadership, and Spain and Gaul will throw off Roman rule!"

Tros grinned. He had made his mind up, which is a difficult thing to do in the teeth of an expert in personal magnetism. He succeeded in convincing even Simon.

"Well and good," he said, folding his arms. "But I will not kill Balbus until he has set that slave free and has repaid Simon what he owes."

"Those two preliminaries granted?" said the Egyptian.

He seemed quite sure that Tros had committed himself.

"Orwic shall smuggle my men into the city if you show him how," said Tros, "and at the proper signal. But who shall give the signal?" he asked.

He was wary of definite lying. Any promises he made he liked to keep. But he had no objection to the Egyptian's deceiving himself.

"I will give the signal," Pkauchios

answered. "Let brazen trumpets peal the death of Balbus! Six trumpets shall clamor a fanfare on the porch. Then plunge your dagger in!"

"Where will you be?" Tros asked him.

"At the banquet. Where else? Behold me. I rise from the banqueting couch. I stand thus to announce an augury. My servant, squatting by the door, will watch me, and when I raise my right hand thus, he will pass out to the porch where the trumpeters will be waiting who are to make music for the midnight dance Chloe has invented. The fanfare resounds. Your men come swarming over the quarry wall. Your dagger does its work—and—and you may help yourself, if you wish, from Balbus' treasury!"

Tros acted so immensely pleased that Orwic came and wondered at him. Simon hove himself off the couch at last and clutched Tros' arm.

"Tros, Tros!" he gasped. "Don't do this dog's work! Don't! You will ruin all of us!"

Scowling, Pkauchios opened his thin lips to rebuke and threaten the Jew, but checked himself as he saw the expression on Tros' face. Tros took Simon by the arms, driving his fingers into the fat biceps, the only signal that he dared give that his words need not be taken at face value.

"Simon!" he exclaimed in a voice of stern reproach. "You owe me money! Yet you dare to try to keep me from this golden opportunity? Fie on you, Simon!"

Simon wrung his hands. Tros turned to Orwic.

"Go you to the ship," he said. "Our friend here, the Egyptian, will provide you a guide to the beach. Talk with Jaun Aksue. Tell him all the Eskualdenak shall come ashore tonight under your leadership, and do a little business of mine before I turn them loose to amuse themselves. Say they shall be well paid. Make them understand they must be sober until midnight. I will come to the ship later and explain the details of the plan. Go swiftly."

CHAPTER XII

THE COMMITTEE OF NINETEEN

IT APPROACHED high noon. Simon had left an hour ago in a sort of wet-hen flutter of indignant misery, with a threat from the Egyptian in his ear:

"Jew! Balbus owes you money. He would welcome excuse to proscribe you and seize your property! One word from me—"

Thereafter Pkauchios held Tros in conversation, seeking to make sure of him, promising him riches should the night's attempt succeed and more than riches, "power, which is the rightful perquisite of honest men!" Too shrewd to threaten, he nevertheless dropped hints of what might happen if Tros should fail him.

"You are not the first. Man after man I have tested. One fool tried to betray me, and was crucified. My word with Balbus outweighed his! Another thought he could do without me, after I had made all ready for him. Those he would have led to insurrection burned his house and threw him back into the flames as he ran forth in his night clothes. No, no, you are not the first!"

"I am the last!" Tros answered grimly, and Pkauchios' dark eyes took on a look of satisfaction.

Then Tros tried to find out where Chloe was without arousing Pkauchios' suspicion.

"Who was that woman," he asked, "who came out to my ship?"

"Oh, a mischievous Greek slave. A very clever dancer who will perform tonight for Balbus."

"Trustworthy?" Tros suggested.

"No Gades dancing girls are trustworthy. Theirs is a very religion of intrigue."

"Ergastulum?" * Tros suggested.

"No. She sleeps to be ready for tonight."

However, there was plainly a mask over Pkauchios' thought. Tros was quite sure he was lying, equally sure he was worried. All sorts of fears presented themselves that Tros was hard put to it to keep from showing on his face. Chloe might have disappeared, turned traitress. He decided he was a fool to have left Horatius Verres at large on the ship. If Chloe loved that spy of Cæsar's—or was he Balbus' spy, pretending to be Cæsar's—then she would quite likely do whatever Verres told her and perhaps betray every one, Pkauchios included.

Yet he decided not to return to the ship until he had spoken alone with Simon. The old Jew was possibly the weakest link in the intrigue. In terror he might run to Balbus and betray the whole plot. Before all else he must reassure Simon.

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* A private prison for the discipline of slaves.

Pkauchios ordered out the litter with the eunuch in attendance and the eight white-liveried slaves. Tros saw him whisper to the eunuch, but pretended not to see. He had contrived to look entirely confident when the Egyptian walked with him to the garden gate.

"After sunset," said Pkauchios, "there will go a messenger to the gate guards who will bid them admit two hundred and fifty slaves on the excuse that they are needed as torch-bearers for the midnight pageant in Balbus' garden. They will be shown a writing to that effect which the fools will think is genuine. Another messenger will go to the Balearic guards who line the beach. And he will take money with him, a considerable bribe. At sunset a great barge will be rowed alongside your ship. Put your men into that. They shall be led to Simon's warehouse where they may help themselves to weapons. And the same guide will lead them afterward to the quarry outside Balbus' garden. He will lead them by roundabout ways so as not to attract attention."

Tros rolled into the litter and allowed the eunuch to lead as if his first objective were the ship. But he had no intention of being spied on by that eunuch, and when the litter halted at a narrow passage in the street to let three laden mules go by he rolled out of it again.

"Wait for me by the city gate," he commanded.

The eunuch demurred, tried persuasion, offered to carry him anywhere, and at last grew impudent.

"You insult my master's hospitality!"

A crowd began to gather, marveling at Tros' purple cloak and at the broad gold band across his forehead. The eunuch tried to drive them away, fussily indignant, prodding with his staff at those who seemed least likely to retaliate, but the crowd increased. Tros felt a tug at his cloak and, glancing swiftly, caught his breath. He saw Conops slip out of the crowd and go sauntering along the street! His red cap was at a reckless angle and his bandy legs suggested the idle, erratic, goalless meandering of a sailor in a half-familiar port.

Tros climbed back into the litter promptly as the best means of escaping from the crowd. Conops, faithful little rascal, would never have left the ship without good reason. Clearly he expected to be followed. The eunuch contrived to clear the way and the crowd dispersed about its business, which was mainly to sit in doorway shadows. As the litter began to overtake Conops he increased his pace until, where five streets met, he turned up an alley and turned about to watch. He made no signal.

Making sure that Conops was not following the litter downhill toward the city gate, Tros vaulted to the ground and had made his way to the alley mouth before the eunuch, walking ahead rapidly to clear the way, realized what was happening.

"This way, master—swiftly!"

Conops opened a door ten paces down the alley and Tros followed through it. The door slammed behind him and in stifling gloom he was greeted by a laugh he thought he recognized. It was nearly a minute before definite objects began to evolve out of the shadows. He could hear a rasping cough that seemed familiar, and there were other noises that suggested the presence of armed men, but the sunlight had been dazzling on the whitewashed walls and there were no open windows in the place in which he found himself. It took time for eyesight to readjust itself. The first shape to evolve out of the darkness was a stair-head, leading downward; then, down the stairs a leather curtain of the rich old-golden hue peculiar to Spain. Above the curtain, on a panel of the wall the stairway pierced, was a painted picture of a bull's head; and there was something strange about its eyes. After a moment's stare Tros decided there were human eyes watching him through slits in the painted ones. There was a murmur of voices from behind the curtain and, every moment or two, that sound of labored breathing and a cough that resembled Simon's.

CONOPS was in no haste to explain. He slunk behind Tros in the darkness, and a man stepped between them in response to a thundering on the street door. He opened a peep-hole and spoke through it to Pkauchios' eunuch; Tros could see him clearly as the light through the hole shone on his face—a lean, intelligent, distinguished looking man. He assured the eunuch in good Greek he was mistaken. None had entered the house recently. Perhaps the next house or the next or the one over the way.

Finally, he advised the eunuch to wait patiently.

"People who vanish usually reappear unless the guards have seized them. Private business or perhaps a woman, who knows? At any rate, I will trouble you not to disturb a peaceful household. Go away!"

He closed the peep-hole and in the darkness Tros could sense rather than see that he bowed with peculiar dignity.

"Do me the favor to come this way," he murmured, using the Roman language in as gentle a voice as Tros had ever heard.

He led down the dark stairs as if they were not quite familiar to him.

Tros groped for Conops, seized him by the neck and swung him face to face.

"Well?" he demanded.

Conops answered in a hurried whisper:

"That fellow Horatius Verres came out of the hold and said 'if you value your master's freedom, follow me!' Then he jumped overboard and swam. I followed to the beach in a boat. All the way to this place he kept a few paces ahead of me. Then he said 'find your master and bring him here, or he'll be dead by midnight!' I was on my way to Pkauchios' house when—"

"Go ahead of me!" Tros ordered.

He loosed his sword in the scabbard and trod quietly, hoping Conops' heavier step might be mistaken for his own in the event of ambush, so leaving himself free to fight. But the curtain was drawn aside, only to reveal a dim lamp and another curtain. The sound of men's voices increased; there was low laughter and a smell of wine. Beyond the second curtain was a third with figures on it done in blue and white. Some one pulled the third curtain aside and revealed a great square room whose heavy beams were set below the level of the street. The walls were of stone, irregularly dressed. There was a tiled floor covered with goat-hair matting, and a small table near one end of the room, at which a man sat with his back to a closed door. Around the other walls were benches occupied by men in Roman and Greek costume, although none of them apparently were Romans and by no means all were Greeks. There were two Jews, for instance, of whom one was Simon. All except Simon rose as Tros entered. Simon seemed exhausted, and was sweating freely from the heat of the bronze illuminating lamps.

"The noble Tros of Samothrace!" said the man with the gentle voice who had led the way downstairs.

Tros glared around him, splendid in his purple cloak against the golden leather curtain, and the man at the table bowed. Simon coughed and made movements with his hands, suggesting helplessness. He who had led the way downstairs produced a chair made of wood and whaleskin and with the air of a courtier offered it to Tros to sit on, but he pretended not to notice it.

"Illustrious Tros of Samothrace, we invite you to be seated," said the man at the table.

He looked almost like Balbus, except that his face was harder and not wearied from debauch of the emotions. He had humor in his dark eyes, and every gesture, every curve of him suggested confidence and good breeding.

Tros noticed that Horatius Verres was seated in the darkest corner of the room, that Conops' knife-blade was a good two inches out of the sheath, that his own sword was at the proper angle to be drawn instantly, and that the men nearest to him looked neither murderous nor capable of preventing his escape past the curtain. Then he accepted the proffered chair.

"Illustrious Tros of Samothrace," said the man at the table, "we have learned that you will lend your dagger to the cause of Gades."

"Who are you?" Tros retorted bluntly.

"We are a committee of public safety, self-appointed and here gathered, unknown to our Roman rulers for the purpose of conspiracy in the name of freedom," he at the table answered. "My own name is Quintillian."

Tros heard a noise behind the curtain, was aware of armed men on the stairs. By the half smile on the chairman's face he realized he was in a trap from which there was no chance of escape without a miracle of swordsmanship or else a shift of luck. He stared very hard at Simon, who seemed to avoid his gaze.

"We wish to assure ourselves," said the man who had called himself Quintillian, "that we have not been misinformed."

"There are two who might have told you," Tros answered. "One is Simon, the other Chloe, a Greek slave. I will say nothing unless you tell me which of them betrayed me."

Quintillian smiled. His dark, amused

eyes glanced around the room, resting at last on Simon's face.

"Your friend Simon," he said, "has refused to answer questions. We are pleased that your arrival on the scene may save him from that application to his person of inducements to speak, which we had in contemplation."

Tros blew a sigh out of his lungs, half of admiration for his old friend Simon, half of contempt for himself for having trusted Chloe. Then he glared at Horatius Verres over in the corner.

"How came I to trust you?" he wondered aloud.

"I don't know," the Roman answered, smiling. "I myself marveled at it. I am greatly in your debt, illustrious Tros. You gave me opportunity to hold a long conversation with Herod ben Mordecai down in the dark, in the hold of your ship. And you left me free to watch for signals from the shore. You knew that Chloe loves me. I am sure you are much too wise to suppose that a woman in love would neglect to signal to her lover." The voice was mocking, confident, cynical.

* * *

TROS stood up and shook himself as if about to speak, staring straight at the man at the table to conceal his intention of charging the stairs and fighting his way to the street. Up anchor and away from Gades—there was nothing else to do! The only thing that made him hesitate was wondering how to rescue Simon.

"You are in no danger at present. Be seated," said Quintillian courteously. "We wish to hear from your lips confirmation of a plot that interests us deeply. We also are conspirators."

"I will be silent," Tros answered, closing his mouth grimly.

He did not sit down, but laid his left hand on the chair-back, intending to use the chair as a shield when he judged the moment ripe for fighting his way to the street.

"Ah, but that is only because you have not understood us properly," said Quintillian. "Trouble yourself to observe that we are not warlike men, nor even armed with anything but daggers. We are students of philosophy, of music, of the sacred sciences. Our purpose is, that Gades shall become a center of the arts, a city dedicated to the Muses. We have heard that Pkauchios the Egyptian plans an uprising which you will lead by slaying Balbus, for whom none of us has any particular admiration. In the interests of Gades we propose to discover in what way we can be of assistance to you."

Tros let a laugh explode in one gruff bark of irony.

"I am no friend of Balbus. I am the enemy of Cæsar and of Rome," he answered. "But if I were so far to forget my manhood as to cut a throat like a common murderer, it would be the throat of Pkauchios! You fools!"

"Not so foolish, possibly, as weak!" Quintillian answered with a suave smile. "But as the poet Homer says, 'The strength even of weak men when united avails much!' "

The mention of the poet Homer mollified Tros instantly. He began to feel a sort of friendly condescension. These were harmless, poet-loving people after all. They might be saved from indiscretion.

"Fools, I said! But I, too, have been foolish. I thought to pluck my own advantage from the whirlpool of this city's frenzy! Murder never overthrew a tyranny. Ye are like dogs who bite the stick that whips them instead of fighting foot and fang against the tyranny itself! Slay Balbus, and a tyrant ten times worse will take advantage of the crime to chain a new yoke on your necks!"

There was a murmur of surprize. Quintillian raised his eyebrows and, leaning both elbows on the table, answered—

"But we know for a fact you have agreed with Pkauchios to stab Balbus in his house at the supper—tonight."

"Chloe told you. Well, I, too, was fool enough to trust her, but not altogether," Tros said, grimly. "I would not trust Pkauchios if I had him tied and gagged! My plan was nothing but to rescue Balbus, to protect him, and so win his gratitude! I seek a favor from him. Bah! Do you think I would lend my men for a purpose that would bring disaster on a city against which I have no grudge, and myself for an act of cowardice? *Phaugh!* Murder your own despots, if you will, but count me out of it! Look you—"

He drew his sword and shook the cloak back from his shoulder. Behind him he heard the click of Conops' knife emerging from the sheath.

"I go!" He took a stride toward the door, but as none moved to prevent him he paused and faced Quintillian again. He decided to test them to the utmost. If he had to fight his way out he proposed to know it. "Simon may come if he will. I have two words of advice for you: Kill me if you can before I gut your men who guard the stairs, because I go to Balbus! I will warn him, for the sake of Gades! Fools! If you must murder some one, make it Pkauchios! If that dark trickster has his way, all Spain and Gaul will run blood! You have let the Romans in and now you must endure the Romans! Make no worse evil for yourselves than is imposed already!"

He beckoned to Simon, but Quintillian rose and bowed with such dignity and obvious good will that Tros paused again.

"Illustrious Tros," Quintillian said, "if you could favor us with any sort of guarantee that those are your genuine sentiments, we would even let you go to Balbus! It is just Balbus' death that we hope to prevent!"

Smiling, his dark eyes alight with amusement and with something strong and generous behind that, he struck the table sharply with the flat of his hand. There was a sudden sound behind Tros' back; the inner curtain had been drawn; in the opening stood two men armed with javelins, and there was a third behind them with a bow and arrows.

"You may live and we will turn you loose if you will convince us," remarked Quintillian. "Time presses. Won't you do us the favor to resume your seat?"

But Tros refused to sit.

"It is you who must convince me!" he retorted.

With his cloak, his sword, the whaleskin chair and Conops to create diversions, he knew himself able to defeat javelins and bow and arrow, but he was interested to discover whether there were any more armed men in hiding. Quintillian, however, gave him no enlightenment on that point beyond continuing to smile with utmost confidence.

"You see," he said, "none of us can go to Balbus, who is altogether too suspicious. He would have us crucified for knowing anything about conspiracies. Yet we have suffered so much in pocket and peace and dignity from former abortive risings that we ventured to take liberties with you in order to nip this one in the bud, or rather, to prevent its budding. Balbus and his troops would nip!"

"Then his troops aren't mutinous?" Tros asked.

Quintillian smiled.

"They are always mutinous. Just now they talk of marching to join Cæsar in Gaul. But a chance to loot the city would restore them to sweet reasonableness, as Balbus perfectly understands. Illustrious Tros, we might not exercise ourselves if we liked Pkauchios or if we thought the city were united. We believe ourselves sufficiently intelligent to take advantage of the disaffection in the Roman camp. The moment might be ripe for insurrection but for one important fact: We have learned that Julius Cæsar is coming!"

He glanced at Horatius Verres, who smiled at Tros and nodded with the same air of amused confidence that he had displayed from the beginning.

"Speak to him," said Quintillian. So Horatius Verres stood up, arms folded, and in a very pleasant voice explained how he came to be there.

"Illustrious Tros," he said, "I am in worse predicament than you, I being Cæsar's man, and you your own. I obey Cæsar, because I love him. While I live, I serve him at my own risk, whereas you are free to follow inclination. I discovered a plot to murder Cæsar. It was launched in Gades, and I sent him warning as soon as I knew.

"I received a reply that he will come here. But though he is Cæsar, he cannot be here for several days, whether he come by land or water. I cannot warn Balbus, who is touchy about being spied on and would have my head cut off to keep me from telling Cæsar things I know. But it is not Cæsar's desire that Balbus should meet death, there being virtues of a sort which Balbus imitates that might serve Cæsar's ends to great advantage.

"From Herod, the Jew, in the darkness of the hold of your ship, I learned of these distinguished Gadeans, who call themselves a committee of public safety. So I risked my life by coming to them, and I risked yours equally, by persuading your man Conops to summon you, believing you to be a man who would see humor in the situation and take the right way out of it."

HE SAT down again.

"May the gods behold your impudence!" said Tros. But he could not help liking the man.

"We know," said Quintillian, "that Pkauchios has ruffians ready to attack Balbus' house at midnight. We also know that he has bribed some of the body-guard, and we suppose he will make some of the others drunk with drugged wine. We imagine he has offered you inducements to bring a few hundred men ashore—"

"You had that from Chloe," said Tros, but Quintillian took no notice of the interruption.

"—to give backbone, as it were, to the mob that might otherwise flinch. And we know there are weapons in Simon's warehouse, some of which we presume are to be supplied to your men. We ourselves might kill Pkauchios, but Balbus has a great regard for him and, strange though it may appear, though public-spirited, we prefer not to be tortured and we object to having our possessions confiscated. Nevertheless, we will not permit Balbus to be slain, and if you are willing to protect him for the sake of Gades—"

He paused and Tros waited, almost breathlessly. In his mind he made a bargain, named the terms of it by which he would abide for good or ill—a final test of these men's honesty.

"We will offer you our silent gratitude," Quintillian went on, "and we will take a pledge from you not to reveal my name or our identity to Balbus."

It was a tactful way of saying they would not murder him if he succeeded and provided he should keep his mouth shut. Tros laughed.

"If you had offered me a price," he said, "I would have spat my scorn."

"As it is, are you willing to betray Pkauchios to Balbus?" Quintillian asked. "You could do it without the risk that any of us would run."

Tros snorted.

"No!"

Quintillian smiled with a peculiar, alert, attractive wrinkling of his face and glanced around the room. Men nodded to him, one by one.

"Had you agreed to betray Pkauchios, we would have known you would betray us!" he said. "Illustrious Tros, what help can we afford you? We are nineteen men."

"See that Cæsar doesn't catch me when he comes!" Tros announced. "Keep me informed of the news of his movements." He looked hard at Horatius Verres. "You," he said, "will you keep me informed? Your Cæsar is my enemy, but I befriended you."

"I know no more than I have told you," Verres answered.

Once again Tros hesitated. Impulse, sense of danger urged him to escape while it was possible. It would be easy to make these men believe he would go forward with the plan, then to return to the ship ostensibly to instruct his own men for the night's adventure. Orwic was on board. He could sail away and leave Gades to stew in its own intrigues.

But obstinacy urged the other way. He hated to withdraw from anything he had set his hand to before the goal was reached. And again he remembered the Lord Druid's admonition, "Out of the midst of danger thou shalt snatch the keys of safety!"

While he hesitated, the door behind Quintillian opened. He recognized the hand before the woman came through, knew it was Chloe without looking at her, looked, and knew she held the keys of the whole situation. There was triumph in her eyes, although she drooped them modestly and stood beside Quintillian's table with hands clasped in an attitude of reverence for the august assembly.

"Speak!" Quintillian commanded, and she looked at Tros, her eyes alight with impudence.

"Lord Tros," she said, "would you have come here of your own accord? Would you have come, had I invited you? Would you not have sailed away, if you had known these noblemen would kill you rather than permit you to kill Balbus? And do you think I propose to lose those pearls you promised me, or my freedom?"

She nodded and smiled.

"Do you think I intend to be tortured?"

There was a long pause, during which everybody in the room, Quintillian included, looked uncomfortable. Then she answered the thought that was making Tros' amber eyes look puzzled:

"These noblemen don't kill me because they know there are others who know where I am, who would go straight to Balbus and name names. It would deeply interest Balbus to learn of a committee of nineteen who propose to direct the destiny of Gades unbeknown to him! It was not I who told those nobles of your plot with Pkauchios. There is one of this committee—illustrious Quintillian, shall I name him?"

Quintillian shook his head.

"There is one in this room who pretends to be Pkauchios' friend and whom Pkauchios trusts. It was he who told. To save your life I signalled to the ship, and when Horatius Verres hurried through the streets I whispered to him so that he knew where to come."

"Who told him to persuade Conops to come?" Tros demanded, not more than half believing her. But Verres himself answered that question:

"Cæsar does not select agents who are wholly without wits," he remarked in his amused voice. "Chloe signalled, which she would not have done if all went well. Suspecting that you might be causing her trouble I proposed to myself to bring a hostage with me, whose danger might bring you to reason. I had observed that you value your man Conops. So I hinted to him that your life was in danger, and of course he followed me, being a good faithful dog. Chloe reached this place ahead of us, and when she whispered to me again through the hole in the door, I sent Conops to find you. Is the mystery explained?"

"You are a very shrewd man," Tros answered. "But why did you tell these noblemen that Cæsar is on the way?"

"To confirm them in their resolution not to let Balbus be slain. It might not suit Cæsar to find Gades in rebellion. You see, this is not his province and it is not certain what the troops would do. If he should assume command here, it might stir Pompey to go before the Senate and demand Cæsar's indictment and recall to Rome."

All the while Verres was speaking Chloe whispered to Quintillian. Her hand was on his arm and she was urging him. Suddenly Quintillian sat upright and rapped with his hand on the table.

"Time presses," he said. "Comrades, we must come to a decision. Shall we trust the illustrious Tros and take a pledge from him?"

There was a murmur of assent.

"A pledge?" said Tros. "From me?"

"Why, yes!" said Chloe. "We think you are an honorable man, but at a word from you to Balbus we might all be crucified!"

The men in the doorway behind Tros rattled their weapons.

"We all risk our lives if we give you liberty," Quintillian remarked. "You are a stranger to us."

Tros began to turn over in his mind what pledge he could deposit with them. There was no alternative except to fight his way out to the street, and he suspected now that there were many more than three men on the stairs. Quintillian enlightened him:

"You would have seven men to fight, besides ourselves. But why fight? Why not leave your faithful follower with us?"

Conops drew breath sharply. Tros turned his head to glance at him.

"Little man," he said, "shall we fight?"

"Nay, they are too many," Conops answered.

For a fraction of a second Conops' face wore the reproachful look of a deserted dog's. But he saw Tros' eyes and recognized the resolution in them. Never, in all their long experience together, had Tros looked like that at him and failed.

"You are not such a fool as you look!" he sneered, staring straight at Quintillian. "My master would lose his own life rather than desert a faithful servant. Harm me if you dare, and see what happens!"

At a sign from Quintillian everybody in the room rose, making a rutching of feet and a squeal of moved benches. Only Tros heard Conops' whisper:

"Now they will trust you! It was I who led you into this trap. Leave me and sail away. The worst they'll do is kill me."

For answer Tros grinned at him, grinned and nodded, clapped him on the back.

CHAPTER XIII

AT SIMON'S HOUSE

TROS watched Conops led away through the door by which Chloe had entered, and then beckoned to Horatius Verres.

"Roman," he said, "you have risked my life for Cæsar's sake. Now the wind shifts. Lean the other way and serve me or, by all the gods, you shall not live to mock my downfall!"

"I serve Cæsar!" Verres answered.

"I also, by the irony of fate!"

Tros took him by the shoulder.

"My father, Perseus, Prince of Samothrace, tortured to his death by Cæsar's executioners, told me with his dying breath that I should live to serve that robber of men's liberties, whose enemy I am! I see I must."

"Serve well!" said Verres. "Cæsar values good will higher than the deed."

"I bear him ill will, but I will not be his murderer," Tros answered. "In fair fight, yes. In treachery I have no willing hand."

"I believe you," said Verres, and nodded.

"Then tell me, when is Cæsar coming?"

"I don't know," Verres answered. "If I did know, I might lie to you. Since I don't know, I tell you the plain truth."

"You know that Pkauchios has prophesied the death of Cæsar. Do you know that he expects the news of Cæsar's death tonight?" Tros asked him.

Verres nodded.

"Do you know by what means he expects the news?"

"By a slave, I suppose. He sent murderers to Gaul. Doubtless he has reckoned up the days, hours, minutes and awaits a messenger."

Tros gripped him again by the shoulder.

"Get you a disguise," he said. "Tonight, near midnight, creep into Balbus' garden and send word to Pkauchios by one of Balbus' slaves that a messenger has come from Gaul who wishes word with him. When Pkauchios comes to you, whisper to him from the darkness, 'Cæsar is dead!' Then Pkauchios will return into the house and make the signal to me to slay Balbus. But instead, when the trumpets sound, my men will rush into the house and protect him against Pkauchios' rabble."

"There will be more than rabble," Verres answered. "Pkauchios has bribed some of the Roman guard. I know that, for I know where some of them have spent the money and I have heard that they boast how they will excuse themselves by saying that Balbus plotted against Rome. I think you will have a hard time to save Balbus' life. Yet if you warn him, he will only suspect you and throw you in prison. Cæsar understands good will. Balbus only understands a fact that he can see with his two eyes, feel with his two hands, bite with his teeth and then turn promptly into an advantage for himself. I think that even should you save his life, he will turn on you afterward."

"I will cross that bridge when the time comes," Tros replied. "Will you whisper that word to Pkauchios?"

"Yes. I can lie to him circumstantially. I know the names of the murderers he sent to Gaul."

Tros wasted no more time on him, knew he must trust him whether he wished to or not, dismissed him with a gesture, beckoned Chloe. She laughed in his face confidently yet not without wistfulness.

"Now we are all committed," she said, "and all depends on you! We die unless you win for us all tonight!"

It was her action that restored Tros' trust in her. She slipped a phial into his hand, a tiny thing not bigger than a joint of her own finger.

"Three drops from that are enough," she remarked. "It is swifter than crucifixion or being butchered at the games!"

"I go to Simon's house," Tros answered, pocketing the phial. He understood enough of the Samothracian teachings to despise the thought of suicide, but he did not propose to chill her friendliness by refusing such proof of it. "Go you to Pkauchios' eunuch. Lie to him as to where I am. Invent your own tale. Bid him look for me at Simon's house. Then go back to your master Pkauchios and tell a likely tale to him."

She nodded and vanished through the same door through which they had taken Conops.

"Simon, old friend, we squander time like men asleep!" said Tros. "Where waits your litter? Will it hold the two of us?"

Simon rose to his feet, but he was numb, dumb, stupid with the fear that made him tremble and contracted all the muscles of his throat until his breath came like the rasping of a saw-mill. He gestured helplessly, but no words passed his lips, though he tried as he leaned on Tros' shoulder. Quintillian approached to reassure them both:

"We nineteen and the few we keep in our employ are not ingrates," he said. "Balbus tortured one of our people all day yesterday. He betrayed no one. We will protect you in all ways possible."

Quintillian led Tros and Simon out by tunnels and devious passages to a walled yard where Simon's litter waited; there he told off four men to follow the litter secretly as far as Simon's house, which they approached by a back street so as not to be seen by Pkauchios' eunuch.

It was an almost typically eastern house

—all squalor on the outside, with windowless walls and doors a foot thick, fit to be defended against anything less than Roman battering-rams. The plaster on the walls was peeling off; there was no paint, nothing except size to offset the appearance of mean shabbiness. But within was splendor.

The door in the wall of the back street opened on a tiled court, with a fountain and exotic trees in carved stone Grecian pots. A Jewish major domo marshaled half a dozen slaves, who set chairs and a table beneath potted palms. More slaves brought cooling drinks and light refreshment. Simon in the guise of host began to throw off some of the paralysis of fear; in his own house he was master and the evidence of wealth around him counteracted the terror of debt and the anguish of unsecured loans, made to powerful, slow-paying creditors.

"Write two bills on Balbus' treasury," said Tros, "one for two hundred thousand sesterces, the other for whatever balance Balbus owes you."

Simon wrote, his hand trembling and, sighing, gave the bills to Tros.

"Tros, Tros," he said, "I rue the day I ever came to Gades! It was bad enough in Alexandria, where Ptolemy the Piper borrowed from the Romans and taxed us Alexandrians to death to pay the interest. But Ptolemy was human and knew men must live. We all lived well in Alexandria. Yey! These Balbuses and Cæsars think of nothing but themselves and their ambition!"

TROS clapped him on the back, his mind on pearls he had on board the ship. There was market for enough of them in Gades to relieve all Simon's difficulties. Yet the Druids had not given them to him to provide relief for slave-trading Jews. It was bad enough to have to give a dozen of them to a dancing girl. Simon, his mind groping for new hope, detected something masked under Tros' air of reckless reassurance.

"Tros," he said, "haven't you a cargo on your ship, some tin or something with which we two could turn a profit? Better that than running risks with Balbus! *Stchnyarrh!* That Roman would kill us both for having talked with the committee of nineteen rather than pay those orders on his treasury! Any excuse will serve him! Spies may have seen us. Safer to go to him straight away, denounce Pkauchios and beg a trading-favor from him as reward! That's it! That's it! Beg leave to take a ship-load of my slaves to Ostia! Then I can draw money against them here in Gades—"

Tros interrupted with another shoulder slap. That panic mood of Simon's had to be cured at all costs, Druids or no Druids. But he was cautious.

"Simon, I have assets in reserve. If I should fail tonight to coax your money out of Balbus for you, I will loan you enough to tide you over."

"Ah! But that Roman wolf is crafty! What if Balbus learns of this conspiracy too soon and sets a trap for you, accuses you of a plot to murder him and —"

Tros touched his sword-hilt.

"Simon, I have two hundred and fifty fighting men. It will be a sorry pass if I can't cut my way to the beach."

"And me? What of me?"

"I will take you with me. Since you are so fearful, hide yourself tonight on my ship—"

"No," said Simon, "no! Those beach guards would arrest me!"

"Very well then, hide by the city gate. Watch the street from an upper window. Keep two or three men near you whom you can trust. Then, if you see anything of Roman soldiers entering the city after dark, you can send me warning—your messenger can pretend he brings me news about the safety of my ship. Balbus' servants may admit him, but if not, they will at least announce a messenger and I will understand. If it comes to a fight, Simon, I will pick you up by the city gate and carry you away with me. But I hold a hostage on my ship—one Gaius Suetonius. Balbus will search all Gades until he finds Conops to exchange against Gaius Suetonius."

"*O-o-o-hey!* But my household goods!" groaned Simon. "My daughters and my daughters' children!"

He put his head between his hands and leaned his elbows on the table. Tros stared at him, scratching the back of his head, wondering what argument to use next. He did not dare to leave the man in that state of panic, nor did he dare to threaten him. Fear is no antidote for fear. Somehow he must make him hope and give him courage.

"Simon," he said suddenly, "it is not too late for me to turn back. I will go to that committee of nineteen, tell them I have thought better of the risk and reclaim Conops. They will return him to me if I promise to leave Gades straight away!"

Simon sat up and for a moment stared at him with frightened eyes.

"You mean—you mean—?"

"I will sail away. I will forgive you what you owe me. I will let Gades rot in its own conspiracies."

"Tros! Tros! You can't! You promised! You can't back out of it, now you have gone this far!" Simon clutched his wrist, and Tros gave him time to feel the full force of a new emotion, staring at him coldly, looking resolute in his determination to have no more to do with Gades and its dancing-girl conspiracies. "Tros! I am an old man, you a young one! We are friends, your father was my friend. You—Tros!"

Tros shook his hand off.

"Farewell, Simon!"

"Tros! You will leave me to be crucified?"

"You have frightened me with your fears and your forebodings," Tros answered. "No man can succeed with such a lack of confidence as yours to make the skin creep up his back."

Simon staggered to his feet and, almost tottering, took hold of Tros by either arm.

"You—are you your father's son? You turn back? You?" His hoarse breath came in snores. "You leave us all at Chloe's mercy? Tros, do you know what it means to be at the mercy of a dancing girl of Gades? She knows everything. She will betray us all to save her own skin. Tros, if you leave us in the lurch now, may God—"

Tros drew Chloe's phial out of the pocket in his cloak. He offered it to Simon.

"Three drops," he remarked.

"*Stchnrarrh!* You! To that, what would your father have said? Tros, I will sooner endure the torture!"

Tros poised the phial in his hand.

"Simon, is it yes or no? Do we burn our bridge and see this matter through to a conclusion, or—"

He offered the phial again on his open palm. Simon took it, held it in his clenched fist, set his teeth—then suddenly dashed the phial to the tiles and smashed it into fragments. A cat came and sniffed at the liquid.

"Then we are agreed? You will be brave? You will see this through?" Tros asked.

His eye was on the cat; he was beginning to feel nearly sure of Simon.

"Go!" said Simon hoarsely. "Yes. I see this through. God give you wisdom, skill, cunning, and make Balbus blind! May God protect us all."

"Amen!" said Tros.

He was watching the cat. It had lapped up nearly all the poison and seemed none the worse for it.

"Watch Chloe!" Simon urged. "She is as fickle—as fickle as quicksilver! She will betray you for the very sake of cleverness at the last second if she can see a way of doing it!"

Tros nodded. The cat had selected a sunny, warm place in a palm pot and was licking its fur contentedly.

"She will play on your emotions, she will win your confidence, she will put herself into your power, but remember, she loves nothing except slavery! Her wits are sharp. She loves to be outwitted! She is clever enough to govern Gades by whispering to Pkauchios and Balbus. And with her whole soul she craves to be governed by some one cleverer than herself! Watch her, Tros!"

TROS watched the cat, which was watching a bird, its tail twitching with the inborn instinct of a destroyer. He kicked the fragments of the phial.

"Better have those gathered, Simon! Now I go marshal my men for tonight. I have a golden bugle that the Britons gave me, and if anything goes wrong at Balbus' supper I will wind a blast on it to summon Orwic and my men. So be waiting by the city gate with your daughters and your daughters' children if you wish, in case that I have to fight my way out of Balbus' clutches."

"Have you only that Briton and those Eskualdenak?" asked Simon.

"Aye," Tros answered. "I must leave my Northmen on the ship, and to man the long-boat and the barge."

"Take care! Take care!" urged Simon. "Chloe will turn that Briton and your Eskualdenak against you if she sees advantage in it!"

"She will have shot her bolt and earned her pay," Tros answered, "if she has persuaded Pkauchios that I went from his house straight to yours. I will see that the eunuch has no chance to carry tales. Those Balearic slingers on the beach shall guard him and the litter bearers until I need them again to carry me to Balbus' house. Now, swiftly, write me out an order for the manumission of a slave and leave a space blank for the slave's name and plenty of room at the bottom for Balbus' seal and signature."

CHAPTER XIV

IN BALBUS' DINING HALL.

IN THE litter belonging to Pkauchios, borne by eight slaves and preceded by a sulkily insolent eunuch, Tros presented himself at the guardhouse by the arched front gate of Balbus' palace one hour after sunset. An officer of the gate guard peered into the litter; the eunuch sneered to him in an audible falsetto whisper about the incredible grossness of barbarians who did not give self-respecting servants time to change their uniform; the legionary clanked a shield against his breastplate as a signal to proceed and Tros was carried up a winding, broad path, in the shadow of imported Italian cypresses, into the glare of lamplight at the marble-columned porch.

There was a veritable herd of well-trained slaves in waiting. Two laid a mat for Tros to tread on as he rolled out of the litter. Two more held his cloak, lest it should inconvenience him as he moved. Two others spread a roll of carpet across the porch into the house, covering the three-headed dog done in colored mosaic and its legend, "Cave Canem." Two splendidly dressed slaves preceded him into the house between two lines of bowing menials and led him into a small room to the left of the hallway where no less than three slaves dusted off his sandals. A household official offered to take charge of his sword, but Tros refused, which caused some snickering among the slaves.

"Tell Balbus, your master, that to me this sword is as his toga to himself. As he receives no guest without his toga, so I enter no man's house without my symbol of independence!"

The official, shrugging his shoulders, smirking, went away to bear that message and Tros sat down on a bench to wait. The slaves seemed amused that he should give himself such airs, yet have no personal attendants of his own; they whispered jibes about him in a language they thought he did not understand; but their snickering among themselves did not prevent Tros from hearing fragments of another conversation.

Close to the bench on which he sat were curtains concealing a doorway into another small room. He heard Chloe's voice distinctly:

"Pkauchios! It is a long time since you have dared to whip me! Come to your senses! I am Chloe, not one of the slaves who knows nothing about you!"

Pkauchios' answer was indistinct, a mere murmur of anger forced through set teeth. Then Chloe again—

"Pkauchios!"

The Egyptian spoke louder with bitter emphasis:

"I have endured your impudence too long! One disobedience tonight or one mistake, and I will have all your peculium confiscated!* I know where you put it out of my reach! I will demand it of Simon, who can't pay! Simon is one of many who will feel the weight of my hand when tomorrow's sun dawns! So remember, it is your own fault you have had no sleep. Dance and sing so well that Balbus is beside himself, or take the consequences and be whipped, reduced to beggary and sold tomorrow morning!"

The curtains parted and Pkauchios came through, frowning, stately, black-robed, with the asp of Egypt on his brow. He checked an expression of surprize at sight of Tros, but Tros managed to convince him he had heard nothing, by avoiding the obvious mistake of trying to convince him. He merely appeared glad to see him, showed him ostentatious deference for the benefit of the watchful slaves, and in a low voice spoke of the main issue:

"My men came ashore with your man, though the barge was hardly big enough to hold them. They are warned to keep silence in the quarry and to expect a midnight signal. Are your Gades rioters ready?"

Pkauchios nodded.

"They gather. Balbus' guard has been well bribed and will not interfere when a crowd surrounds the wall. When your men lead, mine will follow. Near midnight a small town twenty miles away will be set on fire and the legionaries will be summoned to keep order and to help put out the flames."

"In what mood is Balbus?" Tros asked him.

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*A slave's master had the right to do this, but the force of public opinion was against it. The usual practise was to manumit the slave in exchange for a lion's share of the money, and thus retain a valuable 'client' plus more than the price of a substitute.

"He glooms. He has tortured witnesses all day and to no purpose. He even tried to read an augury in the entrails of a woman who was gored by a bull in the street as he came homeward. I have assured him you bring fortune."

"Go to him again then. Tell him I must be allowed to wear my sword and cloak."

"He will never permit it," said Pkauchios, shaking his head.

"Then I go away now!" Tros answered and began to stride toward the door.

His cloak was quite as necessary as the sword because it concealed the golden bugle.

Pkauchios detained him, clutching his arm violently; nervousness robbed him that second of all his hierophantic calm.

"I will try. But ask not too much, or you spoil all."

However, Tros knew how how to deal with Romans, also with Egyptian sorcerers:

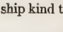
"All or nothing! Cloak and sword, or he may sup without me, and you may manage your own murders!" he added in a deep-growled undertone. Then, "Warn him he must make concessions if he hopes for help from me."

The Egyptian's face looked livid with resentment, but he vanished through the curtains and presently returned with Balbus' head steward, a freed man, ruddy from high living and exuding tact as well as dignity. He bowed, offering a wreath of bay leaves.

"Illustrious guest of my noble master," he said, "you are asked to pardon the indiscretion of the officious fool who first received you. He shall be soundly whipped. The noble Balbus naturally makes allowance for the customs of his guests and feels outraged that indignity was offered you. That handsome cloak and sword will ornament the simple style we keep, as truly as your presence will confer an honor. Pray permit me."

He adjusted the chaplet of bay leaves and, again bowing, led the way across a fountained courtyard into Balbus' presence, in a room whose walls were painted with pictures of Roman legendry but done in the Egyptian style by an artist who was evidently trained in Greece. There were six other Romans in the room, two of them military tribunes in crimson tunics. All rose to their feet as Tros entered; all eyed him curiously, each in turn acknowledging his stately bow but not one of them taking the trouble to return Pkauchios' ravenly solemn greeting. Pkauchios stood back against the wall, and Balbus in a rather tired voice broke the awkward silence:

"Welcome! Be whatever gods you worship kind to us all!"



HE PRESENTED Tros to all the other guests, explaining nothing, merely saying he was Tros of Samothrace whose ship lay in the harbor. They asked Tros whether he had had a pleasant voyage, and one or two of them marvelled loudly at his good health.

"Most sailors come ashore so sick they can hardly walk," said a tribune, admiring Tros' bulk and stature.

"Aye," said another, "and they all get drunk in Gades, where the fever enters as the fumes of wine depart. When Balbus rebuilds the city he will have enough sailors' bones to mix all the mortar, if he pleases!"

Ushering six slaves in front of him, the steward brought in sharply flavored wine, and Tros noticed that Balbus hardly took time to spill the usual libation to the gods before he drank deep and let the slave refill his goblet. He had drunk three times and appeared to feel the effect of it, for his eye was brighter, when he gestured very condescendingly to Tros to walk beside him and led the way across the fountained court toward the dining hall.

"You shall sit at my right hand," he said, as if offering the greatest favor in his gift.

The room in which the supper had been prepared was too large for the house, too grandiose, a foretaste, possibly, of Balbus' plans for a new city. It was overloaded with extravagant decoration. Two rows of columns divided the room into three equal sections, in the middle one of which was the upper table with the couches set, ends toward it.

At the host's end of the table was a dais hung with curtains, furnished with two gilded couches almost like long thrones. The dais was approached by three steps, and behind it were three more steps leading to a platform beneath a gallery. They had entered by a side-door, facing the kitchen and scullery; the main door of the room opened on that platform under the gallery at the rear of the dais.

Facing the dais, twenty feet beyond the table's lower end, was a wooden stage for the entertainers, with a flight of steps leading to the tiled floor of the room and smaller, narrower stages on either side for the musicians, who greeted the guests with a noisy burst of string-music—a jarring twangle of very skillfully manipulated chords.

"I dread draughts," said Balbus, explaining the crimson and blue curtains that hung from the canopy over the dais. "These stone buildings are cold when the night wind comes in from the sea. It is an ill wind, that sea wind. It moans. It makes me shudder."

He tossed off a great gobletful of red wine that the steward handed to him, then reclined on the couch and signed to Tros to take the other one. The remaining guests were ushered to the places on either side of the table by obsequious attendants, and Pkauchios strode gloomily to what was evidently his usual place at the table's lower end, with his back to the stage. A procession of slaves brought jars of wine, offering each guest his choice of half-a-dozen vintages, and the guests began drinking at once, ignoring Pkauchios, pledging Balbus and one another amid jokes and laughter.

Balbus acknowledged the toasts with a nod, but was silent for a long time, now and then glancing at Tros while he toyed with the food, all sorts of food, fish, eggs, whale-meat, peacock, sow's udders, venison, birds of a dozen varieties. Tros ate sparingly and drank less, but Balbus ate hardly at all, though he drank continually. There was almost no conversation up there on the dais until entertainment commenced on the stage and most of the guests readjusted their position so as to watch more comfortably a performer on a slack-wire, who went through diabolical contortions with a naked knife in either hand.

The contortions seemed to suggest unpleasant memories to Balbus. He drank deep and leaned toward Tros.

"Now," he said, "we can talk."

Tros glanced at the curtains behind the dais, and hinted to Balbus that he was ready to talk secrets. Balbus jerked the curtains apart, revealing the great carved cypress door at the rear of the platform behind them. The door was slightly ajar, but it was fifteen feet or more away from the dais, and there was nobody there except one of Pkauchios' slaves squatting beside a basket.

"What do you do there?" Balbus asked him.

"I wait to summon the midnight dancers."

"Wait outside!" commanded Balbus, and closed the curtains on their noisy rings and rod with an impatient jerk. The wire-walker had vanished from the stage. There were nine girls dancing bawdily to dreamy music in a greenish light amid incense smoke, and the guests were giving full attention to the stage.

"I understand you wish for influence in Rome," said Balbus. "Cæsar has denounced you as a pirate. There is a way open to you to become the friend of all Cæsar's enemies."

"Are you his enemy?" Tros asked, and Balbus pouted, frowning.

"No. But the great Pompeius is my patron. A man in my position falls between two stools if he tries to serve two masters. If Cæsar should trespass into Spain, which is Pompeius' and not Cæsar's province, he would do so at his own risk. My information is that he will be here within a few days."

Tros pretended to think awhile and to drink cup for cup with Balbus, but at the foot of his couch near the corner of the curtains there was a very large Greek vase containing flowers, into which it was not particularly difficult to empty a wine-goblet unobserved.

"If Cæsar died," Tros said at last, "Pompeius would be practically owner of the world. He would reward you."

Balbus nodded and drank deep again.

"Nothing for nothing!" Tros said abruptly. "I have brought with me the documents of which we spoke."

He drew the parchments from the pocket in his cloak.

"Presently, not now," said Balbus, showing irritation. "We will discuss those later. Watch this."

"There is nothing to discuss," Tros answered. "You have said you will sign these. Thereafter—"

But Chloe was on the stage, dancing and singing, and now Balbus had eyes and ears for nothing except her.

"Wonderful!" he muttered. "Wonderful!"

IT WAS her wistfulness that pleased. Beneath the laughter and the daring was a hint of tragedy. She was arrayed in white, a wreath of roses in her hair—a picture of youth, innocence, mirth, modesty.

But with an art beyond all fathoming she made it evident that modesty and innocence did not protect her. Not a gesture of indecency, no hint of the vulgarity the other dancers had displayed, marred rhythm, voice or harmony of sound and motion. *Saltavit placuit.*

But she pleased by being at the mercy of the men who watched, not posing as a victim that had been debauched, which is a blown rose, but as a bud just opening, aware of life, outbreathing from herself the fragrance of its essence, yet not hoping to be spared the pain of being plucked and trampled underfoot.

The words of the song she sang were Latin, but the mood was Greek, the tune a mere street melody imported by the legionaries from the wine-shops in the slums of Rome, cynically mocking its own plaintiveness.

"Sun, trust the night; thy beams shall burn again!
Night, trust the dawn; thy shadow shall return!
Earth, bear thy fruit; thy dust shall drink the rain,
Dewdrops shall moisten thee, though dry winds burn.
Trust! The ripened grape twice sparkles in the wine!
Wind among the sedges, ripples on the shore
Sing to me of triumph in the passing. Lover mine,
Is it only love whose ashes live no more?"

There were tears in Balbus' eyes. He had reached an almost maudlin stage of drunkenness. When Chloe's dance was done and the noisy guests pledged her in refilled goblets of Falernian, he leaned over toward Tros again and murmured:

"I will buy that girl, though she cost me a senator's ransom! That dog of an Egyptian sorcerer shall find himself surprized for once! He may be able to read the skies, but in Gades I am governor!"

Tros laughed, his mind on opportunity.

"For luck's sake, noble Balbus, sign these first and pledge me to your service!"

He thrust the parchments forward.

"What were they, I forget," said Balbus, passing a hand before his tired eyes. "Oh yes, Simon and a manumitted slave. Yes, I will presently be drunk. Yes, I will sign them."

He called for his secretary, who came with pen and ink-pot, kneeling on the dais beside Balbus' couch. The secretary read the documents.

"Are they correct?" asked Balbus.

"Simon's account is correct, and he has charged no interest, although he grants six months' time, but—"

"He may be dead in six months or an outlaw!" Balbus commented. The secretary smiled.

"—but the name of the slave to be manumitted is not written. The master's is—"

Balbus pushed him away; he nearly fell over backward. Chloe was coming down the steps from the stage amid shouts of greeting from the guests. "Dance, Chloe! Dance down here among us!"

Balbus beckoned to her.

"Bring my seal!" he snapped at the secretary. "Get me this business over with!"

Chloe came up to the dais and Balbus seized her around the waist, dragging her down beside him on the couch. To Tros it seemed her wistfulness was due to weariness as much as anything, but Balbus was too far gone in drink to make discrimination of that sort.

"Chloe!" he murmured sentimentally. "Chloe! Divine Chloe! What shall I do for you? That old Egyptian holds you at a price that—"

He kissed her and she let him cling to her lips, hugging her. The secretary came and pinched her leg. She glanced at him.

"Noble Balbus," she said, "documents to sign! Oh, who would be a governor of Gades! La-la!"

She broke away and knelt beside the secretary, exchanging one swift glance with Tros as she rubbed at her mouth with the back of her hand. Balbus had crushed her lips against her teeth.

"Swiftly now and be gone with you!" said Balbus, and the secretary put the seal on all three documents, thereafter holding them for Balbus to attach his signature. Having signed, Balbus snatched them and gave them to Tros. Chloe laughed excitedly, in a way that made Balbus stare.

"Your pen," said Tros and the secretary brought it to him.

Tros wrote the name of Chloe in the space provided and the secretary, leaning, watching him, laughed aloud, throwing up his hand in a salute to Chloe. Her eyes blazed answer, and it was that that made Balbus turn and stare at Tros.

"What is that? What have you written?" he demanded.

"I will read," Tros answered, and stood up.

There was dancing on the stage that had

been set with branches to suggest a forest, through which satyrs pursued wood nymphs; but it was dull stuff after Chloe's entertainment. All eyes turned to Tros, and the musicians dimmed the clamor of their instruments.

"An order for the manumission of a slave," Tros read, his great voice booming through the hall. "In the name of the Senate and the Roman People, I Lucius Cornelius Balbus Minor, Governor of Gades, in conformance with the law and with the powers vested in me, hereby manumit one Chloe, formerly the slave of Pkauchios the Egyptian, and do accord to her the status of freed woman with all rights and immunities thereunto pertaining, she having paid in full her value of two hundred thousand sesterces to Pkauchios and thereto in addition, into the public treasury, the manumission tax of ten per cent."

Pkauchios sprang to his feet, indignant, staggered, his jaws working as if he chewed on solid anger.

"But she hasn't paid it!" he exclaimed, his voice broken with excitement.

Tros gave a parchment to the secretary.

"Take it to him!"

The secretary, smiling with stored up malice, descended to the floor and gave Pkauchios one of Simon's six months' bills on the treasury. He appeared to believe that Balbus had contrived the entire high-handed business, so proceeded at once to lend a hand in it.

"Noble Balbus!" he cried from the end of the table where Pkauchios stood staring at the parchment. "This order is for two hundred and twenty thousand sesterces, whereas the price was but two hundred thousand. The tax has been included in the payment made to Pkauchios."

THE Egyptian lost his self-control. He shook the parchment in the faces of the grinning guests.

"This!" he exclaimed. "This is no payment! This is a mere promise—"

There was too much fume of wine in Balbus' head for him to let that speech pass. Tros had watched him hesitating angrily between repudiation of the documents on the score of trickery and the alternative of making a hard bargain in exchange. Now he turned the full force of his insulted dignity on Pkauchios:

"You speak of my promise as—what?" he demanded, rising from the couch. His legs were steady, but Tros stepped close to him and offered an arm, which he leaned on with relief. "Do you question my signature? Do you dare to insult me in the presence of my guests?"

"But this is an unheard of thing?" Pkauchios stammered, struggling to speak calmly.

"You question my authority?" demanded Balbus.

The Egyptian regained his self-control with a prodigious effort, drawing himself to his full height, breathing deeply, then folding the parchment and stuffing it into a pocket at his breast. His mouth was bitter, his eyes malignant.

"I was taken by surprize. I regret my improper exclamation. I accept the order," he remarked and sat down, rising again promptly because Balbus was still on his feet.

Tros' lips were close to Balbus' ear.

"You will never have to pay that bill," he whispered.

"He will sell it on the market," Balbus answered irritably.

Suddenly, under the pressure of personal interest, his brain cleared.

"Yes, yes, the tax!" he said, gesturing with his left hand to the secretary. "Hold that order on the treasury until Pkauchios pays the twenty thousand sesterces in coin. Otherwise the tax farmers will accuse me of irregularities."

He remained standing until Pkauchios had returned the parchment to the secretary, then sat down and drank from the silver wine cup that Chloe held for him.

"Divine Chloe, now you are a freed woman, but I have offended Pkauchios," he said, and kissed her. "No more will he read the omens for me."

Most of the guests were growing very drunk, and the girls who had been dancing on the stage came down to sprawl on the couches beside them. One of the two military tribunes noisily demanded that Pkauchios should deliver an augury. The Egyptian glared at him with concentrated scorn, but Balbus heard the repeated demand for an augury and approved it.

"Pkauchios!" he shouted. "Prove to us you are a true seer and no caviller at fortune!"

Pkauchios rose, glaring balefully at the drunken men and nearly naked women sprawling on the couches. It was nearly a minute before his eyes sought Balbus' face.

"I see fire!" he said then in a harsh voice. "I see a whole town burning and a thousand men fighting the flames!"

"Thank the gods, not Gades!" Balbus muttered. "If it were Gades it would be twenty thousand men!"

"I will read the stars!" said Pkauchios and with a bow of angry dignity began to stride toward the dais in order to leave the room by the big door behind Balbus.

It was Chloe who intercepted him. She broke away from Balbus' arms and ran to meet him midway of the room, putting both hands on his shoulders. Pkauchios stepped back from her.

"Ingrate!" he growled between set teeth. The coiled asp on his forehead was a perfect complement to the hatred in his eyes. Chloe began whispering to him rapidly, but Pkauchios' face was like a wall against her words.

There began a noise of shouting in the court. The door behind Balbus swung open and a centurion entered breathless. Balbus jerked back the curtains.

"Well? What?" he demanded.

"Fire!" said the centurion. "A town is burning about twenty miles away. We think it is Porta Valleculae. The tribune Publius Columella has marched all available men to extinguish the flames. He requests you to make arrangements in behalf of those whose homes are burned."

"They shall have work in the quarries!" Balbus answered. "Bid him bring the destitute to Gades!"

The centurion saluted and withdrew. Balbus closed the curtains with a shudder at the draught, then stared at Pkauchios, who was still scowling at Chloe; but it was now Pkauchios who was whispering. His lips moved slowly, as if he were measuring threats between his teeth.

"A marvel of a man!" said Balbus. "Did you hear him just now say he could see fire? Fire and a thousand men?"

Chloe had moved so that she could catch Tros' eye; it seemed to him that she was trying to signal to him almost imperceptibly. He touched Balbus' elbow.

"It is too early yet to read the stars. He should read them nearer midnight."

Balbus glanced at Tros impatiently.

"It was he," he said, "who prophesied your coming and Cæsar's death."

"Near midnight is the time," Tros answered. "I am a seaman. I know."

Suddenly Chloe screamed so shrilly that she startled all the amorously drunken guests and brought them sitting upright, staring at her. She clapped both hands to her eyes and ran toward the dais, stumbling up the steps and flinging herself on her knees by Tros' couch, sobbing.

"Stop him!" she whispered. "Stop him!"

Then, as if realizing that she had come to the wrong couch, still sobbing with her hands before her eyes, she rose again and staggered into Balbus' arms.

"He cursed me!" she moaned. "He cursed me!"

Balbus began to try to comfort her, patting her between the shoulders, burying his own face in her hair, which gave her an opportunity to catch Tros' eye again. She made a grimace at him and jerked her head in the direction of the stage, then resumed her sobbing. Pkauchios strode solemnly toward the door. Balbus, distracted by Chloe's grief, took no notice of him.

"Music!" Tros suggested, nudging Balbus' elbow. "Who is in charge of the entertainers? It is music that—"

Balbus laid Chloe sobbing on the couch. She was crying, "He cursed me! Oh he cursed me!"

"Pkauchios!" he thundered and the Egyptian turned to face him. "Never was such a miserable farce in my house as this night's entertainment! Where are the singers? Why has the music ceased? You promised me such song and dancing for tonight as should—"

"You bade me read the stars," Pkauchios retorted angrily.

"No insolence!" said Balbus. "To your duty! Read me the stars at midnight."

PKAUCHIOS turned back toward the stage and gave his orders to a wizened man with painted cheeks, who disappeared behind the stage. The orchestra began a brilliant, eccentric tune; the kitchen slaves came hurrying with a dozen dishes heaped with steaming food, and the wine-bearers went the rounds. Laughter and conversation began again as a dozen girls writhed on to the stage to perform one of the dances that had made Gades infamous. Chloe ceased her sobbing. Balbus drank deep. Chloe begged leave from him to go and wash her face before she danced again. The slaves filled up the wine-cups and Balbus, refusing food, leaned over toward Tros, his drunken brain leaping from one passionate emotion to another.

"We were speaking of Cæsar. I must have no official knowledge. Do what you will suddenly, at the first chance that presents itself. Then go to Rome and I will send letters overland recommending you to the favor of Pompeius, who will be absolute master of Rome as soon as Cæsar is out of the way."

"Do you wish me to kill him in your house?" Tros asked.

"Kill him anywhere, so be you do it!"

The women on the stage danced in a delirium of orgy, parodying nature, blaspheming art, ideals, decency. Red light and incense smoke distorted the infernal scene; low drum beats throbbed through it. One of the military tribunes stood and began singing drunkenly a song that had been outlawed by the Roman aediles. Balbus lay chin on hands, staring at the stage. Tros felt a hand on his back, heard a whisper. Chloe had crept back between the curtains.

"Simon sends word there are soldiers coming through the city gate!"

She slipped away and knelt beside Balbus, who threw an arm around her, but went on staring at the stage. Tros did not move. He was watching Pkauchios, who was listening to the whispering of a slave. The Egyptian's face was a picture of emotions stirring beneath a mask worn very thin.

There began to be a creeping up Tros' spine. He felt the crisis had arrived too soon. Something, he could not guess what, was happening to upset calculations. He glanced at Balbus, who was almost sleeping; Chloe with subtly caressing fingers was stroking the back of his head and his temples. She smiled and nodded, her eyes shining with excitement. Plainly she knew what was happening. Tros drew out a little bag of pearls, poured them into the palm of his hand, showed them to her and put them away again. She nodded, but he knew her delight in intrigue had run away with her. She would let the pearls go for the thrill of a dramatic climax.

The girls on the stage writhed naked in infernal symbolism. The stringed instruments and muted drums tortured imagination. Pkauchios got up and left the room by a door close to the stage and Balbus, staring at the dancers, did not notice him. Tros felt for the bugle underneath his cloak, wondering whether Orwic and the Eskualdenak were ready. It was not yet nearly midnight. Possibly some spy had seen them in the quarry; perhaps the soldiers coming through the city gate were on their way to surround them in the dark. But if so, why had nobody warned Balbus?

The suspense became intolerable. He made up his mind to wind a signal on the golden bugle. Better to summon his men and run for it than to run the risk of having them made prisoners. But as he clutched at the bugle Pkauchios returned and stood with his back to the stage, both hands raised, eyes ablaze, his body trembling with excitement.

"Balbus!" he shouted. "Cæsar is dead! The news has come from Gaul!"

Balbus sat up suddenly and stared. The music stopped. Chloe slipped away from him and stood at the edge of the dais. The dancers ceased their writhing. Pkauchios signalled to Tros with a gesture like a dagger thrust, then threw up his right hand and shouted:

"Let the trumpets peal the verdict of the sky!"

Tros clutched his sword. He thought he heard the tramp of armed men, but it was drowned by a flourish of trumpets. There was a clang of shields on armor. He leaped to his feet as the door behind the curtain opened suddenly. A hand wrenched back the curtains of the dais and revealed Julius Cæsar with an armored Roman veteran on either side of him!

Cæsar was in white, unhelmeted, a wreath of laurel on his brow, his scarlet cloak thrown back over his shoulder and his lean face smiling like a god's, inscrutable, alert, amused, as calm as marble.

The centurion at his right hand raised a richly decorated shield and shouted:

"Caius Julius Cæsar, imperator, proconsul and commander of the Roman troops in Gaul!"

CHAPTER XV

CÆSAR—IMPERATOR!

THE DANCERS vanished. The women sprawling on the couches fled. Balbus, and all his guests, staggered to their feet.

"Cæsar!" said Balbus.

Cæsar smiled genially. If he had noticed Tros yet, he gave no sign of it.

"No, no, Balbus! Pray be seated. Pray don't disturb yourself."

His voice, a shade ironical, was reassuring. There was no hint in it of violence. But behind him were more armed men than Tros could count from where he stood. They were formed up in a solid phalanx in the hall.

"Don't let me interrupt your gaiety," said Cæsar. "I have already had my supper."

"There came news of your death!" Balbus stammered.

"I overheard it. Does it seem true to you?" asked Cæsar, smiling again.

His eyes began to scrutinize the guests, who saluted as he noticed them, but he ignored Tros at the corner of the dais. He appeared to Tros to be deliberately giving Balbus time to recover his wits. Tros, the golden bugle in his left, kept his right hand on his sword-hilt, listening, trying to discover how many armed men Cæsar had with him. None noticed Pkauchios, until suddenly Chloe screamed as the Egyptian sprang at the dais from behind Tros—mad, foaming at the mouth.

"Slay!" he screamed, striking at Tros with his left hand, trying to push him forward toward Balbus, then rushing at Cæsar.

Tros tripped him. He fell on his back on the dais, striking with a wave-edged dagger at the air.

"Dog of a Samothracian!" he yelled. Frenzied, he leaped to his feet with the energy of an old ape at bay and sprang at Tros, who knocked him down again. A legionary stepped out from the ranks at Cæsar's back and calmly drew a sword across his throat.

"Now I am no longer a freed woman. I am free!" said Chloe. "And Balbus, you need never pay that debt!"

Cæsar looked bored by the interruption. Slaves came and dragged away Pkauchios' body, Balbus' steward superintending, making himself very inconspicuous. A winebearer poured choice Falernian over the blood on the dais carpet, and another slave mopped it up with his own long loin-cloth, running naked from the room. The steward threw salt on the carpet and covered the spot with a service napkin of blue linen.

Chloe stepped straight up to Cæsar and knelt smiling up at him with all the charm she could contrive.

"Imperator," she said, "I am Chloe, who danced for you in Gaul—she whom Horatius Verres trusted."

Horatius Verres stepped out from behind the ranks of legionaries and stood between Tros and Cæsar, watching with a quiet smile on his handsome face. He was dressed as a slave in a drab-colored tunic of coarse cloth.

"Tut-tut!" said Cæsar. "Go and clothe yourself!"

Horatius Verres made a humorous, helpless gesture. Balbus' steward touched him from behind and beckoned. He shrugged his shoulders and went with the steward to be rearrayed in borrowed finery. Tros made up his mind there were not so many men at Cæsar's back; he raised the bugle to his lips and Cæsar noticed him at last.

"Your men are here already," he said. "They are behind me!"

As if in answer to his words there began a roar of fighting. A centurion barked an order. About half of Cæsar's own men faced about and vanished toward the front of the house, but Cæsar took no notice whatever of the disturbance.

"Balbus," he said, "a noble enemy is preferable to any faithless friend. The story goes you sent men into Gaul to murder me."

Chloe was still kneeling. She caught her breath and glanced sharply at Balbus' face. Balbus, deathly white, threw up his right hand.

"Cæsar, by the immortal gods I swear—"

Something choked Balbus. He coughed. He had become aware that Tros was staring at him. He drew three breaths before he found his voice again:

"—that sorcerer, now dead, that Egyptian Pkauchios—and—"

He turned and looked straight at Tros, began to raise his arm to point at him. Tros drew his sword.

"Balbus," said Cæsar, "you have been well served! Well for you that Tros of Samothrace put into Gades!"

Balbus gasped. Tros stood with drawn sword watching Cæsar's face. A centurion came pushing past the legionaries and whispered to Cæsar from behind him. Horatius Verres reentered the room, handsome, smiling, splendid in a Roman tunic with a broad blue border, and stood close to Tros again, glancing at the drawn sword with a humorous expression.

Balbus' brain was wavering between surrender to the fumes of wine and a sort of half hysterical recovery. Tros' mind was on Orwic and his men, but he could not fight his way past Cæsar's legionaries. Cæsar fascinated him. The man's cool self-command, his manners, daring and superb contempt for any genius less comprehensive than his own stirred grudging admiration.

Chloe broke the silence—

"Imperator—"

But Cæsar checked her with a gesture of his left hand. He was listening. Tros, too, caught the sound of footsteps surging over the porch into the house.

"Orwic!" he shouted.

There came an answering yell, and half the legionaries behind Cæsar faced about.

"Orwic, hold your men!" Tros roared in Gaulish. Then, watching Cæsar's face, "Let none escape! Let a hundred of your men surround the house and guard all exits!"

He laughed. He heard Orwic's boyish voice repeating the order to the Eskauldenak.

"Cæsar," he said, "I have more than five men to your one! The camp is empty, the Roman legion went to a burning village—"

"Yes," said Cæsar, "but that was not your doing, Tros, so you should not boast of it."

"Cæsar!" said Balbus suddenly, recovering his wits, "this is not your province!"

He glanced at Tros, a fever of excitement in his eyes. The legionaries behind Cæsar moved alertly to protect him.

"The illustrious Tros and I are enemies," said Cæsar, "whose activities are not confined to provinces or marred by malice. We use common sense. I have not interfered with your government, Balbus. You must pardon me if I have interrupted even your—" he glanced at the stage—"amusement."

TROS' brain was speculating furiously. There were only two things Cæsar could be doing. Either he had surprizes up his sleeve and was talking to gain time, or else he was deliberately trying to bring Balbus to his senses with a view to getting his gratitude and making use of him. In either event, time was all-important.

"Cæsar," he said, "why did you come to Gades? What do you want?"

"Yes, Cæsar, what do you want?" demanded Balbus.

Cæsar smiled.

"For one thing, courtesy!" he answered. "Balbus, I consider you a churlish host! You offer me no seat, no welcome. You oppose me guiltily, as if I caught you in the act of treachery. Whereas I came for your sake."

But Balbus' reeling brain sensed nothing but his own embarrassment; he was too drunk to take a hint.

"You came unvited!" he said, sneering.

Cæsar smiled again and glanced at Tros.

"I think we both did! Tros, for what reason did you come to Gades?"

"To prevent you from invading Britain, Cæsar!"

"Imperator, that is the truth!" said Chloe, and she would have said more, but Cæsar silenced her with a frown.

"Are you a slave?" he asked.

"No, Cæsar, I am free!"

"Then go to Horatius Verres and keep still."

Chloe sprang gaily to Verres' side and threw her arms around him, kissed him, or else whispered in his ear. Tros suspected the latter. Orwic was having trouble with the Eskualdenak, who were anxious to begin looting Balbus' treasures. In the outer hall his voice kept rising sharply. There were hot answers in almost incomprehensible Gaulish, and every once in a while a Roman centurion added his staccato warning to the noise. Horatius Verres spoke at last.

"Imperator," he said quietly, "I had the honor to report to you that Tros refused to murder Balbus, and you saw that when Pkauchios rushed at you, it was Tros who prevented. Now Chloe tells me that while Tros and Balbus supped together they discussed—"

"Silence!" snapped Balbus angrily. "Cæsar, will you take the word of a dancing girl against me?"

Cæsar eyed him with amused contempt.

"If she should testify for you, should I accept her evidence then?" he asked. Then after a pause, "Let Horatius Verres speak."

"Tros even left a pledge with the committee of nineteen to guarantee that he would not kill Balbus."

Balbus snorted.

"A committee of nineteen? I never heard of them!"

"You shall know them well," said Cæsar. "Continue, Verres."

"And while Tros and Balbus supped together they discussed—"

"Stop!" commanded Balbus, almost choking. "Cæsar, this is not your province! You have no authority to—"

Cæsar raised his right hand with a gesture so magnificent that Balbus checked a word midway and stared at him open-mouthed. Chloe was whispering again in Verres' ear. Cæsar nodded to Verres.

"They discussed what Tros had previously said to me before the committee of nineteen—how that his father, dying, prophesied he should eventually render Cæsar a great service."

Balbus breathed heavily and felt for something to lean against. His steward stepped up to the dais and, lifting his arm, placed it on his own shoulder.

"My noble master has so burdened himself with public duties that he faints," he said, beckoning to a slave to bring wine.

"I suggest he has had wine enough," said Cæsar. "You may continue, Verres."

Chloe was watching Tros out of the corner of her eye. Her breast fluttered with excitement. Verres spoke:

"While Balbus and Tros supped together, they discussed whether it were true that you invaded Britain for the sake of pearls."

"I invaded Britain," said Cæsar, smiling slightly with the corners of his eyes as he saw Tros glare at Chloe, "because the Britons intrigued with the Gauls against me, despite all warnings. But I confess the thought of pearls did interest me. I have in mind to make a breast-plate of them for the statue of the Venus Genetrix in Rome, from whose immortal womb I trace descent," he added pompously. It was his first hint of vulgarity, his first betrayal of a streak of weakness. "What else, Horatius Verres?"

"Tros, who promised thirty pearls to Chloe to procure for him the interview with Balbus, discussed with Balbus at the supper table how he might offer three hundred pearls to yourself, Imperator, as an inducement to you to bury enmity!"

The lie slid off his handsome lips as smoothly as the passing moment. Balbus, his steward urging with a whisper, leaped at opportunity at last.

"I told him he should offer at least a thousand pearls," he blustered, avoiding Tros' eyes. "Cæsar, the words had hardly left my lips when you burst in on us!"

Horatius Verres, hand to his mouth, stepped back a pace.

"I told you I serve Cæsar!" he whispered to Tros.

"Have you the pearls?" asked Cæsar, and Tros saw light at last, knew he must make a sacrifice, but saw he held the situation in the hollow of his hand.

"I have them on my ship," he answered, standing forth and facing Cæsar.

But his eyes were busy numbering the men at Cæsar's back. Beyond the legionaries, in the gloom of the fountained courtyard, he could dimly make out Orwic and the Eskualdenak crowding the Romans.

"I have here five men to your one, Cæsar, and I care nothing for your friendship."

"Have I offered it?" asked Cæsar, adjusting his wreath with one forefinger. "Let us have no brawling, Tros. The place smells like a tavern—" he sniffed disgustedly—"but—" he bowed with mock politeness—"perhaps our host Balbus will excuse us if we act like sober men!"

"Cæsar, I could have slain you when you entered. I could slay you now," Tros answered. "I would hold my own life cheap at the price of serving Gaul and Spain, but the gods have laid no such task on me. Ten tyrants might replace you if I slew the one. I came here for my own sake. I will pay three hundred pearls for what I want. Agree with me or—"

He raised the golden bugle to his lips. Orwic began shouting to him:

"Tros! Tros! What is happening?"

"Await my bugle blast," Tros answered. "Cæsar, is it yes or no?"

* * *

THE LEGIONARIES raised their shields an inch or two, but Cæsar spread both arms out to restrain them.

"Better to die a thousand times than to live in fear of death," he said, "but I see, Tros, that you know that. Since neither you nor I fear death, we may stand on common ground. What is it you require of me?"

"You named me pirate," Tros growled at him.

"I withdraw that gladly, though you sunk my ships. You have served Rome by saving Gades from the mob. I will write it," said Cæsar.

"You owe my friend Simon of Gades three million sesterces," said Tros.

"If that were only all!" said Cæsar, smiling with an air of mock humility. "Debts, Tros, seem as necessary to a statesman as is the appetite that makes us eat. Your friend Simon shall be paid."

"How? When?" Tros asked him.

A flash of humor blazed in Cæsar's eyes. He looked at Balbus long and keenly.

"Balbus—how? When?" he asked calmly.

Balbus bit his lip.

"Come now, Balbus. Tros saved your life, and it is easier for me to act against you than to threaten you. How shall Simon be paid? That legion that went to Porta Valleculæ is on its way back, Balbus, shouting, 'Cæsar is imperator!' No, no, Tros, there is a truce between us. Stay! I merely wish that Balbus should choose his allegiance of your free will, Balbus—of your free will! You are under no distraint. As you wisely remarked, I have no authority in Gades, even though the committee of nineteen has begged me, on my way between the harbor and your house, to add Spain to my province and appoint my own officials. They amused me, but it might amuse me more to—"

"Cæsar, I beg you to permit me to assume the debt!" said Balbus.

"I am afraid it will keep you poor and out of mischief for a long time," Cæsar remarked. "If I consent to allow to escape my mind irregularities that I have heard of, would it be agreeable to you to confer in future with that committee of nineteen with respect to all local issues?"

Balbus nodded sulkily.

"And to remember, Balbus, that they have my individual protection? If the world were my province—then would you wish to rebuild Gades?"

"Cæsar, I yield," said Balbus. "When the day comes that you strike at Pompey, I am with you."

"Tut-tut!" remarked Cæsar. "Who spoke of striking at Pompey? But I see Tros grows impatient. He is thinking of that legion on its way back from Porta Valleculæ. Tros, you are a greater man than I believed you. A mere pirate would have plundered Gades with the opportunity that you have had. Had you been a rash fool, you would have tried to kill me. You might even have succeeded and the world would have been the worse for it. So the world owes you a reward, Tros."

"Reward my men!" Tros answered. The Eskauldenak were growing noisier every minute and Orwic's voice was hoarse from trying to restrain them.

"Balbus shall pay them handsomely," said Cæsar. "They have saved his life. The world is richer for our noble Balbus, although he personally will be poorer for a long time! Yes, Tros, I will accept your gift of pearls for the breastplate of the Venus Genetrix, be it understood—a very amiable goddess, my immortal ancestress."

He strode forward to a couch and sat with grace and dignity, letting the scarlet cloak fall carefully to hide his knees.

"You are in haste, I don't doubt. Yes, of course, that legion is returning. Yes, yes. Balbus, may your secretary bring me ink and parchment? I carry my own pen. Tros, I believe you have my seal. Will you return it to me? Balbus, will you kindly see that Tros' men are handsomely paid? They were my men until Tros ran off with them, hah-hah! Very clever of you, Tros, but beware next time we meet! There was three months' pay at that time owing to each man. So I suggest it would be very handsome of you, Balbus, to give each man three months' full pay of a Roman soldier. It might encourage them not to loot the house! Then, will some one go for Simon and for the committee of nineteen? Balbus, I would like to introduce them to you and to recommend them personally to your generous consideration. By the way, Tros, where are those pearls?"

"On the ship," Tros answered.

Chloe came and stood in front of him and smiled. She held her hand out. Tros counted thirty pearls into her palm, holding his sword under his armpit.

"Cæsar!" she said excitedly. "Imperator! Grant me a permission to wear pearls!"

Glancing up from the parchment he was writing, Cæsar frowned. Horatius Verres put a word in:

"Imperator, no permission will be needed. She will be a Roman's wife!"

"Very well. Why interrupt?" said Cæsar, and went on writing. "Balbus," he jerked over his shoulder, "are Tros' men being paid?"

"My treasurer is paying them."

"Has Simon been sent for? Very well.

Be good enough to sign this undertaking to pay to Simon three million sesterces in equal payments of three hundred thousand sesterces every three months. You understand, of course, this payment is not taxable. He must receive the whole of it. Tros—"

He stood up, holding out a parchment.

"This confers on you authority to go anywhere you please, including Ostia and Rome. It specifically withdraws the charge of piracy against you and names you the friend of the Roman people. You will find the committee of nineteen on the porch. They will return your one-eyed hostage to you. If you should remove his other eye, he might see his way into trouble less easily.

"However, that is for you to decide. You will meet your friend Simon on your way toward the city gate. Be good enough to take him with you to your ship and to give him those three hundred pearls, which he may bring to me and I will give him this liquidation of his debt in exchange for them. I understand you have a hostage on your ship, one Gaius Suetonius. Release him, please. Not that he has any virtue, but for the sake of his beautiful armor. Have you any other prisoners?"

"Herod, the Jew," Tros answered.

"That scoundrel?" Cæsar nodded. "Send him to me in charge of Gaius Suetonius! Be good enough to avoid collision with the little ship on which I came. It is anchored rather close to yours. You will go to Rome now?"

"Aye!" Tros answered, accepting the parchment.

"Hah! You will try to prevent me from invading Britain! You will find the Romans less reasonable than myself. When you have failed, come and make your peace with me. I will receive you! Thanks for the pearls for the—"

"For the wives of the Roman senators!" said Tros and, bowing, first to Cæsar, then to Balbus, marched out straight through the ranks of Cæsar's bodyguard. He was greeted by a roar from the Eskauldenak:

"Wine! Women! Wine!"

His answering roar, bull-bellowed, cowed them into silence.

"To the ship! Behind me, march! Or I will give the lot of you to Cæsar! Ho there, Conops! Run ahead of me and keep a bright lookout for Simon."

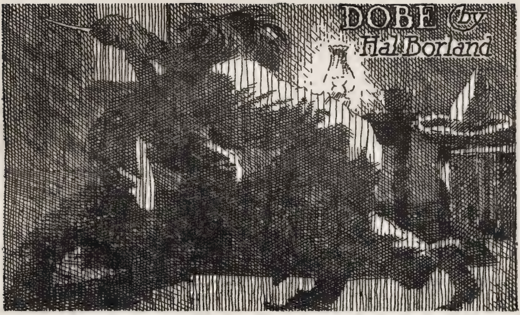
Then he strode under the gloomy cypresses to Balbus' front gate and Orwic fell in step beside him full of eagerness to know exactly what had happened.

"Happened?" he said. "I have promised Druids' pearls to Cæsar's light o' loves, and I have served Cæsar, though I had the best of him. Rot me all death-bed prophecies. They dull men's wits!"

"What next?" asked Orwic.

"Oar and sail for Ostia, before Cæsar has time to set a trap for us in Rome!"

THE END



DOBE

by Hal Borland

"THEY have not yet dried, Sebastian. They are still wet."

The rat-faced little man who had spoken squatted on his heels in the morning sunlight and began rolling a cigaret in the tissue-like corn husks beloved of his race. His hair poked down beneath his fragment of a hat like straw from beneath a ragged stack cover. His tiny black eyes glinted and his sharp nose sniffed the air like a coyote.

"Oh, yes, Juan, they have dried. Pile them up."

Back of where Juan squatted in the sunlight Sebastian hitched two dirty burros to the cross-pole in the mixing pit; but Juan still squatted in the sunlight.

"Juan!"

Sebastian, full-faced, broad-shouldered, reminded his partner that the day could not profitably be all cigarets and squatting on one's heels in the sunshine.

"Come, come! Pile them up. We shall need the space for today's bricks. Come, come!" And Sebastian dropped into the 'dobe pit where he stood shoulder-deep in a hole and shoveled powder-dry, grayish yellow dirt out into the mixing pit where the burros stood.

The quiet of country morning lay like a haze on Manassa Valley, rifted now and then by the crowing of a rooster or the rasping bray of a burro. At the head of the valley, the village of Manassa rested in a brief after-breakfast interval, for the men had begun the day's work and the women hesitated over their coffee cups before clearing away the dishes.

On the outskirts of the village the Mexican colony maintained its usual calm. Barefoot men leisurely started up the mountain-sides driving pack burros ahead of them, going for firewood to sell to the villagers. Occasionally a *nino* would squall in one of the score of 'dobe hovels. Then a sharp Spanish voice would be heard and the quiet would be resumed. Hens sang in the dooryards and pigs grunted as they wandered in and out of open doorways.

Beyond the village to the west, where the warm valley warped its edges to meet the mountains, Juan and Sebastian worked in the primitive brickyard. Both were members of the Mexican colony, where they shared a hut. At night they slept side by side, at meal time they ate from the same table, all day they worked in the same mixing pit.

"*Oh, Oh, por Dios! Por Dios!*" Juan moaned as he shambled to the bricks one day dried, and began piling them beside those of last week and last month. "Oh, this life. It is the ——! Work, work, work. As God sees me here with my poor back bent double, Sebastian, I tumble into bed at night too tired to sleep."

Sebastian continued to throw dirt into the mixing pit.

"Sometimes, Sebastian, I think maybe I shall grow so tired I will have to lie in bed all day and rest." Juan squatted on his heels again and rolled another *cigarillo*, moaning and grunting.

"It is so hot," the lazy one droned on. "For one to work so hard, it is not right. Even *Incarnacion*, he of the long ears, who tramps the 'dobe into mud, even he has his rest. You can sit and rest while I pile the bricks, Sebastian. You can if you will," he hastily amended, as Sebastian shot a quick glance at him. "But I," resumed the whining, "poor Juan, I must work all day long, and pile bricks or pat 'dobe all day long."

The busy partner hesitated. He looked at the pinched face of his companion, pinched not from hunger, but, Sebastian sometimes thought, because Juan was "so little inside." He was so lazy he never even grew fat. And he talked so much— Maybe that was what made his face so thin—he talked all the breath out of his cheeks. And always it was "poor Juan, poor overworked Juan."

"Juan, you lazy!" the gentle-voiced Sebastian reprimanded. "The bricks are not piled and I have mud almost ready for molding. Come, Juan."

And Juan roused himself from his mourning, groaning as his hands found themselves again loaded with bricks.

The sun rose higher, and the little valley, cut off on three sides from the mountain breezes, became ever more hot. Juan, with many gruntings and much profanity, finished piling the previous day's making of bricks and took Sebastian's place, while the quiet partner carried water from a nearby stream to further thin the mud the burros had mixed. And when Sebastian returned with the water, Juan squatted in the shady corner of the 'dobe pit, sound asleep.

"Come, come," he was ordered. "The mud is mixed. Come."

And with more grunting and cursing, the rat-faced one climbed from his shady corner and stood in the mixing pit beside Sebastian, plopping mud into the heavy wooden molds. Great handfuls of the thick paste were scooped up, slugged into the forms, patted firm, and slipped out to make room for the next brick.

"You are sad this morning, Sebastian," Juan ventured when he had yawned himself thoroughly awake.

SEBASTIAN continued to watch his copper-colored hands as they firmly patted the rich mud, smoothed off the top of the new brick, and slid it onto the broad carrying board.

"But such a night and such foolish bets, they would make any one sad," Juan persisted. "The Palomita—" He hesitated, maliciously. "The kiss—" He again started, then hesitated.

Sebastian's lips tightened. Juan saw and knew his words were gnawing at his partner's carefully controlled temper. Juan approached the danger line, but he was a gambler.

"I suppose now the Palomita will be mine!" and the taunter halted work to rub his grimy hands together, rolling little balls of mud from between his fingers.

The dark face of the other deepened to the color of an acorn. His jaw bulged and knotted, and his lips pressed thin.

"Ha, ha! The Palomita—"

"Juan!" It was a sharp warning. But Juan did not heed.

"The Palomita, she is not—"

"Stop!" Sebastian's eyes caught the rat-faced speaker like a pair of dirks. His muddy hands lifted beneath Juan's hooked nose and clenched hard, until the sinews stood high.

"Your clap-clap of the tongue is too much! Dirty-faced burro! Hold your teeth closed before they eat 'dobe. You shall not speak of the Palomita, you *bobo!* She is too good that you should even speak her name—"

A low mumble of voices, English speaking voices, broke off Sebastian's warning and both men resumed their brick-making with quiet, unrevealing faces. Sebastian was sliding his new-made brick from the mold when two of the villagers bobbed into sight and came to the side of the pit.

"Hello, Juan," bellowed the leader of the two, a great, bearded man with laughing eyes and a swagger of confidence in his knowledge of the world and its people.

"Good morning, señor."

"Juan, Mr. Phillips here is new to the country and he wants to get a few loads of bricks for a house. So I brought him over to you fellows." The giant hesitated for some answer.

Juan looked up with a smile and glanced from one to the other of the newcomers. Then he nodded toward his partner.

"I no sell bricks, señor. Sebastian, he is boss."

"All the same," boomed the big man. "All the same with you two boys. Live together, work together, eat together. Probably die together, too." And his booming laugh rolled off up the mountain. "Well then, Sebastian," he turned to the other man in the mixing pit. "How about it? You'll sell us some bricks?"

Sebastian climbed up to the level of his customers and the three men bickered in a jargon of neither Spanish nor English as they walked among the piles of hard-baked 'dobe blocks, thumping them now and then to test their quality. With a final booming laugh the big villager closed the deal for his friend, and all three returned to the mixing pit where Juan sat motionless.

"All right then," shouted the dancing-eyed giant. "We'll be over in the morning after the first load. So long." And as the two villagers swung down the hillside the booming voice rang back, "Get along like brothers, those two. I always thought Juan owned the place, though. Always acts as if he did. Apparently Sebastian doesn't mind, though. Great pair, those two. Always seem to get along without even a quarrel."

The voice disappeared, with the villagers, while Juan and Sebastian patted the wet 'dobe into the dirty molds and the burros nodded in the mixing pit. On the side next the sun the line of new-made bricks were turning a weathered gray.

II

JUAN sat in the open door of the little 'dobe hut, sulkily staring into the valley evening. In the dooryard of the nearest house the four youngest Gallegos children were eagerly beating a half-grown pup, but Juan paid no attention. It was not his pup.

"Juan," came a voice from inside the hut at his back, "Juan, bring some firewood."

The rat-faced man shifted his position as Sebastian's soft tones reached him, but he continued to sit.

"Juan." Again the rattle of pans inside ceased. "The fire is going out for want of fuel."

But the voice only irritated the man in the doorway.

"Do you want cold *frijoles?*"

Juan sighed, spat disgustedly, and slowly got to his feet. With an indistinct oath in the direction of the open door, he unwillingly sought the wood-pile.

The last traces of sunset had fled when the two men sat down to their supper, laid out on a rough table lighted by a flickering oil lamp with a streaked and dirty chimney. In its faint glow Sebastian's full face, flushed with physical exertion and the heat from the stove, was radiant as a moon; all the more so beside the pallid scowl on Juan's lean face. Sebastian had carried water from the spring down the path, had peeled potatoes, had stood over the hot stove every minute since they returned from work and now he gladly sat down to his meal, flushed and tired. A time the two ate in silence, scooping great helpings of *frijoles* from the blackened pot, cutting great chunks from the long, hard loaf. But Sebastian saw no reason for prolonging their differences.

"I met Felipe Barranco at the spring, and he says Jose's bird will win next week," he casually said, cutting a new chunk from the loaf between them.

But Juan did not look up.

"What does Felipe know about it?" he snarled through a mouthful of beans.

"Oh, he knows," the round-faced man laughed. "Felipe saw Jose's cock fight the Sunday before last, and the week before that, also."

"Hump." And Juan crammed his mouth with bread. Sebastian saw that he had essayed an unfortunate topic and sat in silence until the man opposite him again spoke.

"Felipe is a *bobo!*" Juan snorted, for no apparent reason. "A *bobo*, a fool. He does not know a fighting cock from a hen!"

"Perhaps," Sebastian soothed. "Perhaps not."

"Felipe is a *bobo!*" the thin-faced man insisted. "He does not know night from day until he stubs his toe in the dark! And you are as foolish as Felipe!"

Sebastian was still smiling, indulgently, as Juan reached for his cup of steaming coffee, raised it to his lips, and with a final imprecation, filled his mouth at a loud gulp.

The cup struck the edge of the table as the drinker exploded, like a volcano of steam, and as the cup struck the floor Juan leaped to the water pail in the corner.

Sputtering as he swilled at the great gourd dipper, Juan turned fiery eyes on his partner who sat calmly at the table, watching the spilled coffee slowly spread over the table top and across the floor below.

"*Estupido! Animal!*" Juan suddenly raged, turning back to the table, his hand at his scalded lips. "I have told you to pour my coffee cool, *diablo!* How often have I told you, *bobo!*"

The man at the table quietly sipped at his mug.

"Coffee must boil, Juan."

Although the tone was cool, it failed to soothe the scalded man even as the cool water had failed.

"*Animal! Bestia!*" he roared, coming closer. "First you burn my mouth, then you laugh. *Maldito seas!* Once more, Sebastian, and I shall run my—" He ceased suggestively and felt at his hip, where he carried a thin, needle-sharp dirk.

"Juan, sit down."

In spite of his anger, the cool words drew him closer to the chair at the table.

"Sit down."

Juan stopped behind his chair, hands on hips, and stood there.

"You swear at me, Juan, call me names because your coffee was hot and you were foolish enough to gulp it. You swear at me because you were a *bobo*."

Ordinarily Juan would have hung his head, but now he continued to glower and nervously grip his chair-back.

"Sit down now and drink your coffee." Sebastian reached for the blackened pot and re-filled Juan's cup with the heavy brown liquid. "You'll feel better with some good coffee inside you."

"Yes, I'll feel better. But only when Manuel's cock has killed that scarecrow of Jose's. I'll feel better when I have all your money in my belt, moon-face." The scowling one turned back to the water pail, and as he returned to the table he leered malevolently.

"Yes, dreaming lover, I'll feel better then." He laughed harshly. "I'll have all your money, all your bricks, all your brick yard—*Si, señor,* I'll feel better then!"

In spite of his scalded lips he enjoyed his laugh, and sat down to his coffee once more. But Sebastian was not the least discomfited, and he lounged back smoking a cigaret.

"This time, maker of bricks," the eager Juan chattered on. "This time you shall not win. I know these birds. And now your luck shall turn. Sebastianito," he lowered his voice, leaning across the table with his chest resting on his outstretched right arm, "this time I shall win. See? And I shall win not only your money and your bricks. but I shall—" He hesitated eagerly, tasting the words hungrily, "I shall win your Palomita!"

Sebastian's tilted chair came to the floor with a bang, and the lover stared across the table with wide eyes.

"Win the Palomita!" He was surprized a second, then burst into laughter. "No, no, *Estupido,* you could never win the Palomita. She is not blind. Do you believe, foolish one, that she would even look at you?" The lover watched the weazened face across the table, streaked with grime, lined in anger, thin, crooked, ugly, most of all, cruel.

"Yes," came the brazen answer. "She would look at me. I would *make* her look at me, moon-face. I would *make* her. And when I had taken her, she would shun you as she would a pig!"

Sebastian smiled and would have laughed but for the earnestness of the other's face. Juan was madly serious.

"YOU could never win her," Sebastian returned, not quite catching the full import of the other's boast.

"Never?" Juan's eyes sparkled. "Never is a long time." He leaned closer. "But seven days, Sebastian, seven days, and the Palomita would never again look at you." He watched the broad face eagerly.

"Seven days is little time—for one so inexperienced."

"Ha! Perhaps not so inexperienced. The goose does not always know where the duck swims."

"No. Perhaps not. There was Sensitiva, back in Mexico—"

"Seven days," Juan interrupted, impatiently.

"No," Sebastian smiled and puffed at his cigaret. "Not even in seven years."

"You would wager?"

"Wager?"

"That I could not win in seven days?"

"Ha!" Sebastian stood up with a gesture of finality. "Do not think others love you as you love yourself." He walked to the far end of the room, where his guitar hung. As he reached the instrument he turned and smiled over his shoulder.

"Wager? Would I wager? Everything, lazy one, everything." He lifted the guitar from its peg, smiling still. "See, I go to my *senorita* now. She waits for me, for the golden moon."

Juan leaped to the doorway where he faced the lover, his lips thin, his arms tense.

"You would gamble for the Palomita?"

"Juan, Juan!" There was a note of impatience. "It is enough. You do not love the Palomita. She does not want you. You chatter."

"I ask, you will gamble?" Juan stood his ground.

"There is no need to gamble."

"Again I ask, will you roll the dice?"

"For what?"

Sebastian's guitar had swung down until its fat body rested between his bare feet, its tasseled head in his hands. He smiled ironically. For Sebastian was not without the Latin weakness for games of chance. There are things too sacred for such toying, however, even to gamblers. As love.

Juan drew from his pocket a handful of draggled paper money.

"What for?" he mocked. "Dirty *dinero*. Stinking *pesos* I eke out in your 'dobe pit. Will you gamble?"

"No, Juan. You have lost enough money today. You have bet on a cock that has never won—bet twice. Go talk to the coyotes." And he made for the door. Still the tall, thin man blocked his way. Now he clicked two white cubes in his hand.

Sebastian hesitated. He was a gambler. He could roll the dice with the best of his race. And Juan, the nervous, the shaky-fingered, erratic Juan! Never before had he challenged Sebastian to the game. He lost, even at the hands of the village boys. Yet he was always gambling. He would never learn. So with a smile, Sebastian stepped closer to the door, only to be blocked again. Should he gamble with Juan? Perhaps this would be the solution to the problem of getting away peaceably. If he gambled and won all Juan's money, then he would sulk—but he would be quiet. Anything to quiet that voice! But for the Palomita? Sebastian laughed at the thought. He would take Juan's money, shut him up. He would gamble, money for money.

"All right, Juan. I will gamble. My money against yours. And when I have all yours, do not shout 'Cheater!' " Sebastian tossed the guitar on to the bed.

"For the Palomita?" Juan's sharp eyes glinted eagerly.

"For your money, *bobo*. For the dirty *dinero*."

Juan hesitated. His tiny eyes glittered and he was about to remonstrate further when Sebastian strode toward him. The cubes in Juan's hand called irresistibly to his gaming self.

Quickly the thin-faced man squatted on his heels beside the rickety table, the dice clicking eagerly in his hand. Their spell was too great.

Sebastian squatted opposite him, and Juan's dirty, crumpled bill fluttered at the edge of the light circle. A clean, crisp bill was dropped beside it, and the nervous hands of Juan, the chatterer, cupped the cubes, rattled them a moment, and scuttered them across the floor.

"*Siete!*"

One cube showed four black dots, the other three. Juan had won on his first cast. His high squeal of laughter seemed to lift him half off his mahogany heels as he shouted, "*Dos! Dos!*" and pointed to the two bills he let remain on the floor.

Sebastian smiled and dropped two fresh bills beside them.

Again the dice hopped along the floor, and eight became Juan's point. In three more casts he made it, with two fours. He left two dollars on the floor, and again Sebastian covered.

Twenty minutes the dice hopped about, now in the hands of one, now the other, and the heap of money at Juan's knee grew. Sebastian, the lucky one, lacked his surety. Now it was his hand that trembled. Now it was his eyes hawked the dice as they scampered.

Juan poised the cubes between his fingers while his eyes squinted until they were flashing knife-slits. With a flourish he pushed his heap of bills and silver into the light between the two of them.

"This, Sebastian, the lucky one, this against the brickyard!" He rocked forward on his knees and grinned maliciously. "This little heap of your money—that is no longer yours!" He sat back on his heels and laughed.

Sebastian fingered the two bills remaining in his hand. Six dollars. He estimated the heap Juan had pushed forward. Fifty dollars, perhaps sixty. Then he looked at his right hand. What was wrong with it? Those four square fingers, that heavy palm; what was wrong? Never before had they betrayed him. And now they had lost all the earnings of a year. Surely it was the incident of a moment. They would win it back for him. He looked across at Juan, rocking on his heels and laughing. Then at his fingers. All they wanted was another chance—

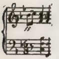
"*Sí!* The brickyard. Roll them!"

Juan leaned forward with the craft of a snake. Slowly he shook the dice in his right hand. His bony fingers closed over them and the cubes rattled sharply. With a snap of the wrist Juan cast them scampering across the floor. They slowed. One sank to rest with a full face of dots to the light. Six! The other pattered uncertainly into the shadow, quivered with its six in sight, then fell back. A single black eye glared upward, almost with a twinkle of derision for Sebastian.

"*Siete! Siete! Siete!*"

Juan leaped to his feet, jamming the heap of money into one trousers pocket, and sprang about the room chanting his word of victory:

"Seven! Seven! Seven!"



HE SAW the guitar on the bed, tossed it into his arms, and plucked at it softly. Sebastian still squatted in the shadows, his great, dark eyes dazed like those of a horse floored by a blow from a club. Juan began the chords for "La Paloma," humming the tune as he strutted about the room. All the while he watched the man on the floor, who mutely watched the white cubes glaring their contemptuous *siete* at the ceiling. Juan's glee finally overcame his melody, and he burst into high-pitched shouts of laughter as he tossed the guitar on to the bed.

"Ha, the gambler! He will bet anything! Ha ha! The gambler! Perhaps now he will bet his guitar, that plays sweet love songs for the Palomita. Perhaps now he will bet—"

"Yes, I will bet the guitar!"

Sebastian was on his feet facing the laughing one.

"I will bet, *burro, bobo!* I will bet!"

Juan sobered.

"You will bet?"

He was amazed. After this moon-faced fellow lost all his money he still wanted to bet! When Juan lost time after time, he always wanted to quit. What sort of idea was this?

"*Sí.* The guitar. The love songs. Even the house— It is mine, remember." Sebastian's face was pale and set with determination. "And if I win, Juan, my lucky one, who scalds his mouth and shouts curses—if I win, you go!" The full-faced man was tense in his proposal. A last stand. He clenched his traitor fingers tight about one another, dug his nails into his palms.

But Juan had no ears for the last words. "If I win—" Ho! What a one! "If I win—" Juan's fingers caressed the crumpled bills in his pocket.

Again the two brown men knelt in the circle of light.

"Three casts, Juan, and he with the most points takes all." Sebastian reached toward the dice. "I will cast first, then you, then I again until each has three."

"No, no. I shall set a mark for you. I shall cast all mine first, then you!" and Juan eagerly grasped the white cubes.

"If you will."

Sebastian sat back on his heels. Then as Juan elaborately caressed the dice, the full-faced man spoke softly, incisively:

"And the winner, he with the most points, he shall have everything. The house, the brickyard, the guitar—"

Juan's toothy grin nodded, and without listening for more he sent the dice scampering across the circle of light. They clicked an instant, slowed, settled, and stopped, showing a five and a four.

The thin face was taut and motionless as Juan picked the two white cubes from the floor, cupped his hands over them, and again shook them above his knees. Another snap of the wrist and a second time the dice bobbed into the yellow circle of light. Their white bodies hopped along the hard-patted 'dobe floor like rabbits under a full moon. They slowed. One dropped to a halt and the other turned over twice, showed a six, and settled. The first beamed with a four.

A nine and a ten. Nineteen. Sebastian could beat it. The tense Juan would surely roll low this time. It would be a five or a six—surely no more than an eight.

The dice were clicking across the floor a third time. They pattered toward the light, rolling easily. Two pairs of eyes followed them as two cats stalking the same canary. A full side of spots gleamed to the light and one cube settled. The other wavered beside it. A one was coming up. Seven! Seven, lucky only on a first cast! Four spots tilted and started down the other side.

The cube hesitated, flinched. The four flashed back, and the dice settled beside its mate.

Juan's thin lips spread in a smile of relief. No gambler need be ashamed of that. Twenty-nine in three casts.

As Sebastian picked the dice from the floor a soft oath crept from Juan's thin lips, a thankful oath almost like a prayer of thanksgiving.

"*Dios!* God!"

Thirty, he must make. Thirty in three casts. Sebastian had done that, and better, before. But now? He eyed his thick fingers and pressed his lips more tightly together. A quick snap of the wrist, and the dice leaped from Sebastian's half-opened hand, jumped warily, and settled showing a five and a six.

One to the good. Eleven on the first cast. Sebastian's tension relaxed the least bit. He shook the dice softly this time, his fingers begging, cajoling. But even as they struck the floor they hopped apart as though terror stricken and fled to opposite sides of the light ring. At the left one scuttered into the shadow and glared sullenly from an eye in each corner. At the right, in the very edge of the glow, the fat cube leered at him like a three-eyed old bishop, self-sufficient and heartless.

Sebastian's hand shook as his fingers closed over the dice one at a time and lifted them from the floor. *Siete!* The seven on the second cast. The warning of the gods! He could not look up at Juan's leering face opposite him, but he could feel the malicious grin on those thin lips aching to taunt him. He shifted uneasily on his knees and placed the cubes on his palm, side by side. Slowly he turned them until threes and fours were out of his sight. Eighteen he had cast. Eighteen in two throws. Now it must be two full faces of dots. Two sixes to win. A five and a six to tie. One slip—

Carefully he placed the dice in his left palm, cupped his right over it, inverted them, and held the cubes close in that right hand's fingers. The sharp breathing of the two men was the one sound in the hut as Sebastian hesitated. Two votaries, they squatted there, at their shrine.

The dice struck the floor with a single click. Scuttering into the light, they clung together, broke apart and swerved once more. As on Juan's last cast, one settled full in the light, six black eyes open. The other hesitated, broke away, and its full face flashed. A single eye gleamed beneath it.

Another seven!

"*Por Dios!*" A prayer crept through Sebastian's lips.

The six was almost over. The one flared. Then the cube dodged, flinched sidewise, settled.

Six! Six! Two sixes!

Sebastian leaped to his feet with an animal squeal of joy. He panted like a fagged runner. He drew his open hands over his gleaming face, clenched and unclenched his fists, sighed. Then he walked to the bed and reached for the guitar.

JUAN still squatted in the circle of light, watching the dice. He picked them up, one at a time, eyed them absently. But his sharp glance found nothing. They were the same cubes he had cast. The same. Then his hand swept the floor. It was the same floor on which he had cast. The same. But with a twitch he leaned forward. His hand had found a pebble! Probably carried in between one's toes. It lay outside the circle of light, but could Sebastian, the cunning Sebastian, could he not have rolled that last dice against it, then pushed it away as he rose? Here was a pebble! Sebastian should not have won. He had not won more than half a dozen casts all evening! He must have cheated! He must always have cheated in the past when he won Juan's money! Sebastian was too lucky!

Juan's hand tugged at his waistband, and with a leap he was across the room, hands high and carrying a flash like a sliver of moonlight.

"*Ratero!* Cheater!" he cried.

Sebastian had turned as Juan leaped to his feet, saw the thin form dash toward him, saw it in the corner of one eye. There was no escape. Juan was too close. Sebastian had no time to grapple. He whirled away from the bed, and his right arm swung the broad red back of the guitar between his body and the lashing arm with the sliver of moonlight.

With a rip and a splintering of thin wood, Juan's knife plunged through the light instrument, plunged as it might have gouged the torso behind it.

The guitar plunked on the bed, thrown there by the force of the knife thrust, and lay humming as its strings vibrated.

The knife was flashing again, and Juan, the thin, the rat-like, rat-faced, whirled on Sebastian, who had dodged back in an instant of safety. The knife gleamed, and Juan again leaped.

Once more Sebastian was too quick for him. The splinter of light seared across Sebastian's hip and ripped down his trouser leg, but it did not sear deeply.

With a grunt Sebastian, spinning on his bare heel, had Juan by the left wrist. That free hand had flown too loose. Quicker even than the armed right hand of his assailant, the heavier man again spun on his heel, and Juan was whirled in front of him, his left hand high between his shoulder blades. With a twitch Sebastian pushed the captive hand higher. Juan cried out in pain, and the knife clattered to the floor. Unarmed, the rat-faced one was thrown half across the room.

"Dog! Fool!" And Sebastian picked up the knife, tossed it into a far corner beyond the bed. "Now, Rat-face, you may go." He stepped toward the crouching Juan, whose eyes blazed like those of a trapped coyote. "Go!" He pointed toward the door.

Before the heavier man could move, Juan had hurled himself at the two legs in front of him. The two men crashed to the floor with a thud that even caused the dirty chimney on the sputtering oil lamp to waver.

Juan's stringy arms and legs swung and clutched like steel rods. Lazy, but strong with anger! For a time Sebastian was busy defending his very throat from those long-nailed, clutching fingers. As he pinioned one arm, the other flew at his neck. He held both, and the lithe Juan slid between his knees like a pig, ripping at hair, flesh or clothing with the teeth of an ape.

He slipped free, darted to the table. The supper dishes still sat in the dull glow, and among them lay the heavy loaf of dark bread, with the dull, nicked butcher knife beside it.

Sebastian was on him as Juan turned, knife in his hand. But this time he kept both hands clear. Crouching, he darted beneath Sebastian's outstretched arms, was behind him, and lunged downward with the dull weapon.

The lunge would have driven the weapon, dull as it was, in to its stained wooden handle, but Sebastian met it half way. His left elbow swung back like a piston with a blow to Juan's chest. Unbalanced, the blow swerved. Sebastian wriggled to one side, and before the knife could again be poised Juan's right wrist was in the left hand of Sebastian, unscathed, in a hand like a vice of sinew and bone. As they crashed to the floor that left hand clung to the wrist of that armed right, and the struggle was a battle for a knife. Slowly Juan's grip loosened as Sebastian's tightened, and as the knife finally was dropped, the round-faced man swept it far across the floor toward the corner where the other knife had gone.

As they rolled about Juan's teeth caught at Sebastian's shoulder and blood came. Then he tore into Sebastian's forearm and more blood came. But before his teeth again found flesh, Sebastian's right hand came, deliberate as the rising moon, fought off battering arm and legs and feet, and fastened its fingers on that thin, round, garrulous throat. Slowly it tightened, the fingers biting in like the spiked jaws of a bear trap.

Juan once saw a weasel fasten its teeth in the nose of a dog and hang there, slashed by the dog's claws, battered by his struggles, hang there until a man came and killed the weasel. Even in death its jaws locked on the dog's nose.

So he saw himself now, Sebastian at his throat. He forgot the knife. He forgot the dice. He forgot the money, the brickyard, the hut, the guitar! Both hands flashed aimlessly around his head. Tighter and tighter that clamp at his throat locked.

No man would come and kill this weasel!

III

AS HE laved his body in the cold water from the basin, Sebastian felt a new life. He was scarcely tired now. His hands ached, his forearms were sore. And that long gash on his hip stung a bit. But the bruises on his body, the torn flesh on his shoulder, they were painless.

Carefully he dried his brown body on a worn towel and pulled a pair of frayed trousers over his gleaming limbs. As he drew his shirt down over his head and shoulders he softly hummed the melody of "La Paloma."

"It was so easy," he gloated to himself. "So easy! And now I must have a new helper at the 'dobe pit. A helper," he mused. "The eldest Gallegos boy, he will be the one. He is young and strong."

The light from the new risen moon crept in the doorway from over the mountains and the man hesitated as his eyes caught the soft glow.

"It is an evening for a serenade," he spoke in the tone of a man well pleased with himself and with the world. "A night for a serenade." His eyes sought the guitar on the bed, a black hole in its broad back. Picking it up, he plucked a series of chords which, despite the gaping back, rang full and rich. "It is not so much—" and he flipped the instrument over to see the damage—a neat slash, with one crack running half the length of the body. "Soon, my love, soon!" and he tossed the instrument back on to the bed.

Cautiously he walked to the door, peered out. Then he smiled toward the moon. Full five minutes he stood there, gazing into the dusk away toward the village. Then a muffled bell sounded across the valley, and the soft *shush-shush-shush* of a locomotive getting under way. A shrill whistle blast burst in on the moonlit silence. The midnight passenger train was creeping down the valley toward the outside world, down toward the south, toward Mexico.

Until the muted sounds of the locomotive died away Sebastian stood there. Then with a laugh he softly said to himself:

"She will love me for this night, the Sensitiva. She will make him work, the Lazy One. Ha ha! And she will demand of him, what cat, what woman of the North, tore such holes in his neck. Ha ha! And it would have been so easy, so easy, to have choked him dead and thrown him into the 'dobe pit. So easy."

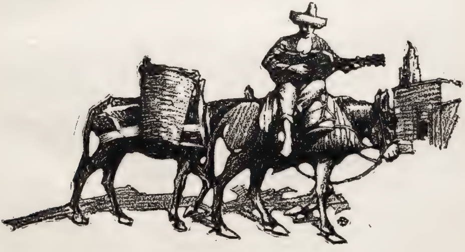
He turned back to the bed, lifted the guitar into his arms.

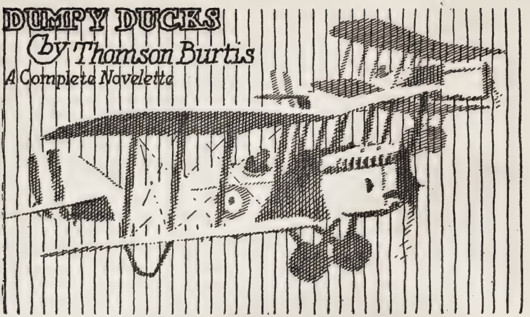
"Flower of my heart!" he exclaimed, as he stepped through the doorway and stood in the full light of the great *pimiento* red moon. "*Flor de mi corazon!*" Then he threaded his way among the huts along a familiar trail.

"Yes, it would have been so easy—too easy! This is better. This means more. He hated the 'dobe. But the Sensitiva and his *ninos*, ah! they will drive him to the brickyards of Mexico. The Sensitiva is wise, too wise for a woman. Ah, how he will long for the 'dobe of Manassa Valley!"

As he hurried through the shadows his fingers unconsciously found chords and his lips hummed tunes, eager for the Palomita as a rose is eager for the sun.

"*Ay, ay! que vente conmigo chinita,*
Adonde vivo yo."





DUMPY DUCKS

by Thomson Burtis

A Complete Novelette

Author of "Groody and the Gushers," "Slim Grabs Some Grease," etc.

HALF a dozen of the motion picture company, reinforced by Sheriff Bill Trowbridge and Mayor Sam Edwards of McMullen, were sharing our customary late afternoon rendezvous on the porch of the recreation building. The dozen border patrolmen were stretched out in attitudes of ease and laziness, as usual.

My regular spot had been reserved for me, so I stretched my six feet six of fleshless bone alongside the steps, my back against the building. I'd just landed from the eastern patrol to the Gulf of Mexico, and I was four degrees hotter than the hinges of ——. My coveralls were nearly as grimy with oil as my face, and in contrast to the other khaki-clad flyers who'd shined themselves up for the occasion, I looked even less like one of these so-called airmen than usual.

Incidentally, you have full authority, hereafter, to consider that "I" means me, John Evans. I'm usually called "Slim," for no particular reason except that in addition to my height, I'm so thin my Adam's apple looks like a full orchard. To compensate for the lack of proportion otherwise, my nose is a truly prodigious organ and my dogs are Great Danes. That's that.

The Texas sun was still drawing shimmering heat waves from the little sandy airdrome, and they were so thick and shivery they made my eyes ache. I shut said peepers for a second, and right then the far-away drone of an airplane reached my ears.

I took a squint west, toward Laredo. The last patrol had been completed, so it was a stranger.

"Well," I remarked to all and sundry, "don't say that you had no warning nor that I didn't confess my sins. The second I let it slip out in Marfa that a movie company was here to take some shots for a serial and that the border patrol was to be in some of 'em, I knew Dumpy'd get a leave and try to horn in on a picture. He'd shoot Niagara Falls in a peanut shell for a stickful of type."

"Is he another border patrolman?" queried the vivacious Miss Vivian Darling.

As near as I could figure, she'd started in the movies about the time views of the Civil War filled the newsreels. However, she held her age well, even if she was breaking in a new chin and had a funny look around the eyes. She was a synthetically beautiful woman, decorated artistically.

"He is," Tex MacDowell answered her, "one of the Marfa flight."

"What a pretty ship!" exclaimed Laura Mae Lee, the other girl present, pointing to Dumpy's white and black D. H. "It's—it's so different!"

Her wide eyes held no trace of sparkle or feeling. Those were her first words in some time. Ordinarily she just sort of sat still in her cute, dumb, girlish way.

The ship was over the airdrome now, about three thousand feet high. Dumpy was the only flyer who'd painted his ship to suit himself, so we were all sure it was the flying wonder himself. Likewise, we knew what was coming. He'd spotted the fact that we had guests, and was bound to give them a treat. Gather two people together anywhere, and Dumpy'd try to fly a Caproni through a keyhole.

He decided to loop, today, despite the rule against stunting De Havilands, and he went to it with a will. He did about twenty-five perfect ones, and the dive-out on the last one brought the whole gang up standing. He hadn't cleared the ground more than five feet, and from then on five feet was a whole mess of altitude for him.

In his twelve cylinder Liberty, running wide open and fairly shaking the ground with its roar, Dumpy banked and zoomed and dipped around that airdrome as if the ton-and-a-half bomber was a scout he was flying at five thousand feet. He was never more than a foot from St. Peter's outstretched hand, grazing hangars and drawing lines in the dust with his lower wing.

"Shucks!" grunted Corrigan, pipe in mouth and coarse black hair sticking up truculently. "Any flyer could do that who was crazy enough. Just grandstanding!"

Coming from the big, new man, any element of jealousy for Dumpy's work was distinctly absent. Corrigan, we'd learned, always said exactly what he thought and gave not a single —— for what any one else might think about it. He was a big, ruggedly good looking chap of around thirty, who made considerable money on the side painting covers for the cheaper grade of magazines. He outlined a mean bathing girl. I never knew a chap who hated hypocrisy as thoroughly or spotted it and nailed it as sincerely as he.

Dumpy seemed to be on the trail of a dragon-fly or something. Conversation was impossible with that motor roaring away out there. The movie people were enthralled, and I admired the flying while I cursed the craziness of the man doing it.

I'd taken my eyes from the sight for just a second when a crash jerked them back. The D.H.'s tail was in the air as it bounced over in a cartwheel. Dumpy's wing had hit the ground.

The ship came to rest on its side amid the din of splintering prop, tearing linen, and the crackling of struts and spars. I was on my feet automatically, leaping like a kangaroo toward the wreckage which was now merely a heap of débris in the blazing sun. If the thing only wouldn't catch fire!

I got there four laps ahead of the ambulance, and had more of a margin over the other flyers. As I arrived the heap moved, and from the center of it emerged a fat, perspiring, smiling face, smudged with oil and dripping blood.

With a few more wrenches, heaves and other maneuvers he was standing upright, linen draped over his neck, a piece of wood behind his ear, and his helmet in tatters. Everybody was there now, panting and pale and wondering. Kennard and Corrigan were closest, and I noticed that the big fellow's black eyes were almost red with a fiery glow that seemed literally hot.

Dumpy grinned around the circle, his half shut eyes lingering longest on the girls. Then he saluted from his post in the middle of that debris.

"Pardon me, sir," he said to Kennard. "But may I leave this here a while?"

He stepped out blithely, enjoying every minute of it. He was the center of attention, and his pouter-pigeon chest swelled out until his rotund stomach didn't look so prominent.

"Doggone motor cut out just for a second," he told Kennard. He was always ready with an alibi. "If the air hadn't been so thin I'd have caught her, anyway, and at that—"

"Horse radish!" blared Corrigan, his dark face pale and that red glow flaming hotter in his eyes. "Your motor didn't cut out. Your brain did! You got what was coming to you for being a crazy fool, and the only thing that happened was that you didn't keep your ship off the ground in a vertical bank!"

"The —— I didn't!" retorted Dumpy hotly. "What do you know about it? Who ever told you you were any judge of flying? I've never seen you show anything."

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Corrigan wearily, and the look in his eyes had changed, somehow. It was as though a volcano which had been momentarily in eruption had been ruthlessly bottled up.

For a half minute or so it was an ugly situation, with Dumpy bridling like a bull pup and a nice public fight looming in the offing. Everybody was strained and silent and uncomfortable. Then Cap Kennard broke the tension by introducing Dumpy to the four shaken movie men and the two half hysterical women. He forgot his wrath for the moment.

"Now here," he proclaimed, "are what I call two good looking girls! You're all getting a real introduction to the border, eh? That wreck give you a kick? Should have had a camera here. I'll do some real stuff for you later."

And so on, ad infinitum. As far as flying was concerned, he was always suffering with a mental freeze and a verbal thaw. It was the only thing in the world he was conceited about, but where the air was concerned he was as naïve as a child in his fixed belief that he was the best flyer in the world. And the —— of it was that he was as good as I've ever seen, and could make good on every boast he made!

HE WAS a good-natured, lovable, fat little youngster of twenty-three that we all laughed at and took for granted, so to speak. But it appeared that Corrigan wasn't accustomed to the grandstand kid. I was walking with the new man while Dumpy strutted his stuff with the movie folks ahead. I noticed that my ordinarily philosophic companion had a dark, moody and thoroughly disgusted look on his rough-hewn face, and usually nothing in the world but his own business made any difference in his life.

"Don't mind Dumpy," I told him. "His only real fault is that he's a publicity hound and is so enthused about his flying ability he won't believe anybody else is in his class or that there's anything he can't do. He's a good egg otherwise."

"It gives me a pain in the neck, Slim," grunted Corrigan, "making a —— fool of himself and then shooting an alibi!"

"Well, what of it?" I inquired. "It's no skin off your nose, is it?"

"No," admitted Corrigan in his deep, husky voice. "But he's such a simple little squirt he makes me mad."

Which called up a bit of wonderment on my part. Corrigan had spent a few days marooned at Marfa in a rainstorm a while back, and I wondered if his readiness to jump on Dumpy and that gentleman's snappy eagerness to exchange insults was the result of a private feud. Dumpy was ordinarily immune to criticism, and Corrigan wouldn't have walked across the street to see the Johnstown flood. He was, ordinarily, as sufficient unto himself sort of fellow, giving no part of a —— for any one else or their opinions, as I'd ever been around.

Back at the porch Barry, the director, got ready to leave. He was a small chap with a great big head. His brow and eyes were fine, but from there down his face dropped away to a pointed chin. The company was a cheap unit of a big Independent organization, putting out wild west thrillers for the two-for-a-cent stunt star, Art Arthurs. Arthurs was a good egg, and the only one in the lot about whom my sensitive nostrils could not detect an aroma of ham. He wasn't at the field. He was over in Mexico, drunk.

"Then you'll assign a couple of your best flyers for that sham battle tomorrow afternoon, eh?" Barry inquired of Kennard.

Kennard nodded. We had orders from headquarters to cooperate to the fullest with the movie people, because of the publicity the Air Service would get.

"I'll be one of 'em!" announced Dumpy. "I'll put on a real show for you!"

In the second of silence which fell over the gathering at this generous attempt to save Kennard trouble, Dumpy's eyes roved to Corrigan, who was pulling on his pipe with a saturnine grin on his face.

"Inasmuch as Corrigan, here, knows so much about flying, maybe he'd like to be the other one and show me some good tricks!" Dumpy went on, a nasty challenge in his voice and eyes.

His conceit, I thought gleefully, had been punctured for once.

And if Corrigan, plus the wreck, had got under Dumpy's skin, Corrigan's epidermis had been punctured likewise for some unknown reason. He didn't say a word, but that red glow leaped into his eyes and there were streaks of lightning passing between the two of them as their gazes held. Everybody there knew instinctively that Dumpy wanted to show Corrigan up on the morrow.

Kennard broke the tension.

"We'll be ready for you," was all he said as he got to his feet.

As the group scattered to the two cars which had been supplied by the frenzied

Chamber of Commerce, I saw Vivian Darling speak to Tex MacDowell and Tex shake his head in apparent regret. When she said good-by to Corrigan her eyes held his for a moment, and she said:

"You'll come to see me, won't you? I'd like to talk to you about your art. I've always been so interested in things of that sort."

"Why—er—certainly," he grunted in his customary brusk fashion.

"Hey, Mr. Barry! Got room for me?" inquired Dumpy loudly. "I'm going to town."

Without waiting for an answer, he ensconced himself in one of the cars alongside the curly-haired dumb belle. There was nothing the matter with his nerve at any time.

"By the way, where do Tex and Bob get off for so much attention from this Darling girl?" enquired Pop Cravath, our bald-headed adjutant, as the calvacade disappeared in dust.

"It may have something to do with the fact that Tex's dad is one of the richest men in Texas," snorted Corrigan, "and that about half McMullen figure I make at least twenty thousand a year."

"Furthermore," grinned Tex, "she's about one jump ahead of mother parts."

That she might, as thus unchivalrously suggested, be receptive to matrimony combined with money didn't seem so unlikely, at that. She was no star, you understand. In fact, the whole company were unknowns as far as I knew.

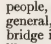
At supper that night the matter of the combat next day was talked over idly. It was a case of two flyers doubling for actors. Whether or not Corrigan was to fly was not in the foreground of the conversation. I think everybody had the same idea I did—that Dumpy was a whale of a flyer, Corrigan only good, and that he'd tie Corrigan in knots and come down talking longer, louder and more persistently than ever. Fellows like Tex and Jimmy Jennings, who was an ace, and Kennard, who'd all snared themselves a Boche or two, might whip Dumpy, because he'd never been in an actual scrap. Nevertheless, it wasn't precisely easy to give vent to such sentiments.

Or wasn't, until Sleepy Spears came back from town around eleven o'clock and broke into the poker and bridge games with some news.

"Dumpy's telling the whole town about the dog-fight tomorrow and advising everybody to come out to see the most sensational flying ever done," announced Sleepy. "He's a little drunk, and to hear him tell it it's a scrap for the honor of the Marfa flight, the good of the movies, and the final proof that Dumpy Aliwicious Scarth is the greatest flyer on the border. He's trailing the movie people, spending money like water and, in general, raising ——. Old Sheriff Trowbridge is telling all his friends, and it looks like an occasion between the town's curiosity about the movies and one thing and another."

Kennard looked at Corrigan.

"I can cut Dumpy out of it altogether," he mused. "But he sort of challenged you, Bob, and all that stuff. If it don't come off, the little squirt'll be yapping all over the Air Service. What say?"



NOW Corrigan, to be in character, shouldn't have given a single, solitary ——. He didn't give a hoot for publicity or a crowd, and Dumpy's chatter, if broadcast to the world, ordinarily wouldn't have made any more difference to him than the hoot of a bullfrog in a New Jersey marsh. But some way, somehow, Dumpy had got under his skin with the same effect as a burr under a saddle has on a horse.

"Unless somebody else wants a crack at him, I do," he announced grimly. "I'll bid three hearts."

So that was that, and next afternoon we gathered sadly for the slaughter. Four or five hundred cars lined the airdrome on two sides, and easily a couple of thousand McMullenites watched an hour and a half of movie making. They were taking a lot of little shots, like Art Arthurs supposedly taking off with Dumpy a mechanic in the back seat, and all that stuff. I didn't know what the plot of the instalment was, except that both villain and hero had airplanes and Laura Mae Lee, the gal, was in a —— of a fix. This Vivian Darling was the villainess of the piece.

For the scrap they had blank machine gun cartridges that would throw a lot of smoke, and one camera on the ground and another to take stuff from the air. I was to take the fox-faced little cameraman up for those.

Dumpy was in his glory. Right then Paradise was just a summer resort compared to McMullen, with his name on every lip and all that stuff. He swaggered around his ship, acted like one of the company, and ever and anon cast contemptuous looks at Corrigan. Whether or not there'd been anything between them before or not, that little incident of the day before had made enemies of two men who ordinarily were the last specimens in the world you'd figure would be mixed up in anything of the sort.

I went up first, flying the twelve cylinder Liberty wide open to get altitude fast. Dumpy and Corrigan followed. I wasn't enthused at the prospect; Corrigan'd just be licked to a frazzle and Dumpy that much harder to live with. And any tricks Corrigan had up his sleeve—he'd been overseas likewise—wouldn't mean so much. With that crowd down below Dumpy Scarth would be an aerial whirlwind, a flyer who knew not fear, but only craziness. And with the movies to top it off, Dumpy'd have tried to land on his back if it would help any.

They were to come at each other at four thousand feet, head on, and the fight start evenly. Both were flying ton and a half DeHaviland bombers with four hundred and fifty horsepower motors. Which ships are no cinch to maneuver, and too frail to do too much with.

I got in position and drummed up and down above them while they jockeyed for position. Finally they were set, and started on signal from the ground.

Both were flying wide open, I could see that, and the two ships roared toward each other like two monsters of the air intent on a collision. The first man who gave way would be at a disadvantage, and Dumpy's nerve would hold under the circumstances. Smoke was coming from both guns.

Then Corrigan went into a dive at the last minute. If Dumpy'd done that too, they'd have met, head-on. Dumpy banked like a flash to get on Corrigan's tail.

Right there Corrigan caused my eyes to pop out so far they bumped against my goggles. The second he started his dive he banked, and in a moment was diving at right angles to his former course. Two seconds of a full-power dive, and by the time Dumpy was around, looking for the ship below him, Corrigan was coming up in the first half of a loop.

He had so much speed it seemed as if that D.H. arched upward six hundred feet. Dumpy was far below now, but in a second Corrigan would be on his back, and then have to come swooping down out of it.

But he didn't. Just as the D.H. was about to go over on its back on top of the arc, it started to turn. I couldn't hear myself, but I gave a whoop of joy. Corrigan could do the true Immelman, and I felt as if I was thrusting the stick forward and kicking the rudder myself as the D.H. turned on its fore and aft axis and came level. He'd saved every inch of altitude, was level, and to his left Dumpy was banking again, trying to get pointed at him from at least three hundred feet below.

Corrigan, by that one maneuver which I hadn't dreamed he could perform, had gained the strategic position. Altitude's the most important word in any kind of flying.

Like a flash he went into a full dive, pointed at Dumpy's ship. With his advantage, it didn't take a second to get on Scarth's tail.

But he didn't stay long, for Dumpy, whom I knew was raging, heartbroken, utterly crazy, started to fly. He threw his ship around the sky in twists and turns that came so fast I could hardly follow them. He handled that D.H. as an ordinary flyer might maneuver a little scout. It was impossible for Corrigan to keep riding his tail, but always he was above him and often pointed down at him. That D.H. of Dumpy's was a bucking, rearing, skidding, slipping, stunting outlaw, but Corrigan had the edge because he had the altitude.

Two minutes of this sort of flying, and I knew that Dumpy's ship must be a loose-wired, vibrating, over-strained hulk. DeHavilands aren't built for that. I was relieved when Corrigan zoomed up and started spiraling down toward the brown handkerchief below, with hundreds of smudgy white faces like a border around it.

But Dumpy was not through. He must do something to save at least a remnant of his conceit. So he tried to hornswoggle the laymen below by getting on Corrigan's tail, spiraling down behind him, and acting as if he was riding the McMullen flyer down to the ground.

He did a good job of it too. He got so close my breath wasn't working regularly. Sometimes there was less than two feet between the ships. And flying a ship that close at a hundred miles an hour, with no brakes to help you, in bumpy Texas air is no restful diversion, even to watch. But Dumpy, master flyer that he was, did it.

Corrigan evidently got sick of it and worried. I saw him look back repeatedly and finally level out and motion Dumpy down. Dumpy flew his ship up alongside him. He edged his left wing into the area between Corrigan's fuselage and right wing. Closer and closer he came as they flew over the field, the ships rising and falling in the air currents. It was beautiful formation flying, but too close. A man could have stepped from wing to wing.

What happened I don't know. I think a combination of an upward current of warm air which Corrigan, ahead and a foot or two lower, got into first. His ship started upward, and just then Dumpy must have eased forward a bit on his throttle. Or maybe the motor picked up a few R. P. M. of itself, and his speed increased slightly. Anyway, the two wings locked and I, with my ostrich-like neck craned over the side of my ship, ripped out one curse and bade the two of them farewell.

Dumpy had at last grandstanded to his doom.

The linen on both wings was ripped, and the wind was turning it inside out. Not a hope for them. This was long before these effete days of "seat packs," when all flyers wear parachutes.

Corrigan's ship went into a dive, and then he banked. And he ripped his crippled wing loose. It was buckled back toward the fuselage, as was Dumpy's.

Then, for the first time, I saw Dumpy's location. His ship, it seemed to me, was over the crowd, and only six or seven hundred feet high. It looked as if the greatest tragedy that had ever hit the Air Service was to happen right then when he crashed among the mob.

Corrigan was coming down in a flat spin. How he kept it so flat I don't know, but by some quirk of the ship's rigging plus his own skill, the nose stayed well up from a straight dive, and the big D.H. spun slowly downward. In the other ship Dumpy, his crippled wing down, was sideslipping desperately to get it over the field.

I was diving madly, my Liberty fairly shrieking and the ship shaking itself to pieces. The wires were shrilling so loudly I could hear them above the motors' roar. Corrigan was sitting like a statue as he whirled downward toward the ground, but Dumpy was fighting like mad. His head was twisting and turning to look at the hysterical mob below, and I could see him braced against the stick, his body taut.

BY SOME miracle, Corrigan's ship hovered above the ground and fell, half on the good wing and half on its nose. The wing broke the shock, and when the dust died down I saw him move in the wreckage. And it didn't catch fire. Then Dumpy crashed within fifteen feet of the crowd, but he'd saved twenty-five lives by his flying. His ship just rammed its wing into the ground.

The ground camera was grinding all the time, I noticed.

I had to wait awhile to land, because the mob just overran the field. Corrigan seemed to be all right, but Dumpy was carried out.

After swooping across the field a few times to clear it, I dropped my ship across the fence and landed in a series of graceful leaps and bounds. I taxied to the line and joined the gang just as Dumpy came limping into our circle, which was the center of a group of about seven hundred milling spectators. The sheriff and a few other intimate friends were in the forefront, of course, and everybody was talking it all over. Here and there women were being resuscitated, and Major Searles, our flight surgeon, made up for ten years of loafing in about half an hour.

Dumpy and I sort of collided with the flyers at the same time, And he didn't waste a minute.

"A —— of a flyer you are! he blazed to Corrigan. "Can't even fly your ship straight and level when you're leading a formation! You made me—"

"Shut up!" barked Corrigan as the crowd pressed closer.

"I won't shut up!" yelled Dumpy, his mind full of just one thing. That was to alibi himself in front of the crowd. "You threw your ship in front of mine. Couldn't even fly it level or straight! Of all the flyers ever on the border, you're the worst! You couldn't fly a formation a hundred feet apart! Why, I was sliding along nice as pie—"

Big Corrigan just stepped forward and clamped his hand over fat, little Dumpy's mouth. There was that red glow in his dark eyes again, and his black hair was standing up in an unruly mass. Somehow, though, it did not seem to me he was in such a —— of a temper.

"Now you'll listen to me, you big-headed, crazy young fool! Trying to show off before this crowd, by ——, and flying a close formation when the air's so thin and the bumps so hard you couldn't control a kite in it! And just because I'm still alive doesn't mean that I shouldn't beat you to death and close that mouth of yours forever! Do you understand that? Between bumps and other things you ran into me, and anything else you say is a —— lie and the alibi of a fat-headed little fool that would go to —— and back and carry anybody else with him to get his name in the paper!"

Dumpy was struggling helplessly in the big fellow's grasp. Corrigan went on without passion, and he just undressed Dumpy, showed him naked to the world, and then took him apart and put him together again. Dumpy, humiliated, raging, knowing he was wrong, wriggled furiously with hot tears in his eyes.

"There, by ——, for once in your life somebody's told you the truth," grated Corrigan, and let Dumpy go.

Scarth fairly threw himself on Corrigan, fists doubled and snarling indistinguishable things. We were surging forward to grab him, but we didn't need to. Corrigan's ham-like fists had him helpless in a second.

"Some more grandstand!" he sneered contemptuously. "I could break you in two and you know it. Just acting, that's all. By yourself you'd run from a six-year-old boy!"

Corrigan had every excuse. He'd just escaped death by a gnat's whisker, and Dumpy, under the conditions, was just a fool youngster who was utterly beside himself at his humiliation, the aerial beating he'd taken, his own flying mistake, and a thousand people, including his girl and the movie people, looking on. Nevertheless, I didn't feel comfortable. Corrigan was being unnecessarily cruel, somehow. It was far from a pleasant sight to look at Dumpy—down deeper in the depths than he'd ever been—and Corrigan rubbing it in.

I'd thought Corrigan was too big for that. Besides, while Dumpy'd been worse than ever during his stay, the little chunk of fat was the kind of a good-humored freak that we hadn't taken seriously and couldn't be very mad at.

When Corrigan released him again Dumpy stood quietly, his face red as a beet and his chest heaving. The fat had gathered around his eyes, and they were like vicious little pin points in his fleshy face.

It was an ugly scene there in public. Dumpy's mouth opened twice, but for the first time in my experience no words gushed forth. He was so mad he couldn't talk. In Corrigan's harsh attitude there was a certain contempt, an attitude which seemed to say that Dumpy wasn't worth treating as anything but a child.

"I—I dare you to go up with me again!" raved Dumpy finally. "I'll show you who's the flyer around here."

"That'll be about all of this!" barked Captain Kennard. "Come on, boys—"

"He don't dare go up with me again! I'll bet him a thousand dollars—"

"Pipe down!"

It was like the snap of a whip, and the Captain's mouse-colored, close-clipped hair stood up like a porcupine's quill. He didn't often bite 'em off like that, but when he did, whoever he was talking to felt it. Corrigan sort of snorted a disgusted snort in Dumpy's general direction.

I could see Mr. Ronald Fairman, highly perfumed juvenile, grinning with delight. That was once he showed his teeth without thinking about it, I presume.

We scattered, and in about three minutes Dumpy was whirling off to town alongside Laura Mae Lee, while the jubilant juvenile, not quite so jubilant then, occupied the starboard position.

It left a bad taste in the flight's mouth, and Corrigan had lost considerable of his solid popularity. At dinner the subject was not referred to except in passing, but the demeanor of the flyers told the tale. Corrigan, as usual, was himself, and while he must have known that we figured a full-grown man had taken advantage of a child, he didn't give a ——.

It further deepened the slight tinge of mystery which enveloped the rugged giant, at that. He'd come into the flight unknown, except by the reputation his magazine work had given him, and proceeded to do exactly the right thing. As always, a man who can keep his mouth shut aroused respect. He didn't try to get too genial, joined in when invited, replied intelligently when spoken to, minded his own business and speedily showed himself a mature man who was a good egg and knew, in general, what it was all about. He positively refused to talk about himself in any manner, and kept to himself a good deal. Did an awful lot of reading. While he was friendly, he gave no grounds for thinking that any one in the flight meant much to him. As a social ornament he was as useless as I am, and curtly snipped off all attempts on the part of McMullen people to make a two-for-a-cent lion out of him. When he did enter an argument or announce an opinion it was with a sardonic mockery and accurate knowledge that couldn't be mistaken.

All of which made the fact that Dumpy Scarth had lassoed his nanny and had it bucking all over the place more mysterious than ever, and subtly but unmistakably jerked Corrigan three or four steps down from his former exalted position.

DUMPY didn't show up at the airdrome that night, nor the next day. But around five-thirty Barry came hustling out to the field, Mr. Jason Young, modern mortician, acting as chauffeur and Mr. Gregg Houston, raving realtor, acting as escort for Vivian Darling. Vivian buttonholed Corrigan to one side while Barry, his fine eyes flaming with enthusiasm and his ingrowing chin wobbling nervously, sprung the news.

"We'll have to ask for some more cooperation, Captain!" he sputtered. The squat little director was a human dynamo. "We can use all the shots we took practically. The cameramen got everything—collision, crashes, everything. Building on those accidents as a foundation, we're going to produce the greatest two-reel serial instalment the business ever had, and the most sensational air pictures ever filmed! Changed the whole script of the episode to take 'em in.

"Furthermore, I've been assured over the long distance phone that the Government will sell us an old DeHaviland airplane, and Lieutenant Scarth has offered to deliberately crash it for us, as well as doing some other extraordinary flying feats. Of course we'll pay him liberally. The idea of the story now is that—"

"What did you say?" roared Corrigan, cutting off one of the fair Vivian's verbal gushers before it got well under way. "Dumpy going to crash a DeHaviland?"

"Come down five thousand feet in sensational fashion as if out of control, level out apparently by accident and as though the ship was still out of control, and crash. He says—"

"Nobody cares what he says," Corrigan barked rudely. "Did you offer to put his name in the picture and take a close-up? If you do, he'll be glad to set fire to his ship at ten thousand feet for you and then jump out without a parachute."

"Are you—his guardian?" snapped Barry.

"No. The good Lord has been so far, but it looks as if that was about over."

"Well, it's his own offer, and I presume he's twenty-one," the considerably wrought up director remarked, and then went on to explain the film.

The idea of the finale was that Dumpy, supposed to be the villain in an escaping plane and trying to get across the border with the loot or something, was to be chased by the whole flight, with the hero in the lead ship. Furthermore, the half dozen principal characters were to all fly, and the pictures be taken in such a way that an audience would know that they weren't faked. Shots in the air and from the ground. Barry had the incidents of the day before all worked in.

The finale was the shooting down of Dumpy after another terrific air battle, with shots of his plane falling all the way down and the crash. Barry calmly announced that the crash was to be in the mesquite, right close to the river.

Can you imagine that fool Dumpy offering to crack up a DeHaviland that way?

He was on leave, wasn't in our flight, and it was his own business. Nevertheless, dinner was devoted to a blasphemous discussion of the matter in which Corrigan took no part. He sat silently, his mahogany face savage and his bushy, black eyebrows drawn together in a frown.

"Dumpy right now, added to his natural nuttiness," summed up George Hickman, "is half crazy because he's been shown up publicly in a variety of ways. He's just a lunatic now, ready to kill himself to prove he's good."

He might have added what we all were thinking, but he didn't. Said cogitations were that the open razzing of Mr. Robert Corrigan had led to the present *status quo* of one Lieutenant Scarth.

If there was any doubt of Dumpy's condition, it was dissipated when he sort of sneaked out to the field next day, got his suitcase and left word that he was going to stay in town from then on at the hotel. Pop Cravath reported that Dumpy was far from himself—in a sort of hysterical and raving condition. He didn't want to talk to any flyers, it seemed, until he regained his proper position at the top of the heap.

A couple of nights later Jimmy Jennings, Sleepy Spears and young Carson, social representatives and official footflingers of the flight, returned from a dance in honor of the company to announce that Vivian Darling and Dumpy were thick as molasses, and that you couldn't have slid a piece of tissue paper between 'em all evening.

"Furthermore," announced Jimmy, "I have it on good authority that said condition has existed for three days now. Apparently the young vacuum has been discarded for the old warhorse. And has she got Dumpy wound around her finger? Gentlemen, hush!"

"He's talking more than ever, but somehow there isn't the real confidence there," Sleepy told us. "He's licked a little, I'm afraid. He still believes in himself, but he isn't sure that everybody else does."

Corrigan, who'd been like a shaggy bear in an evil temper for two days, listened and said nothing. But the next night, shaved, shined, shampooed and thoroughly shellacked, he took off in his knockout roadster for town.

Furthermore, from then on he was away often. And my secret agents, including Sheriff Trowbridge and our thé dansant trio, speedily informed me of the fact that Corrigan was endeavoring earnestly to make Miss Darling forget Dumpy. And, surprizing to state, the estimate of the beauteous lady, formerly uttered by the cynical Corrigan and the irrepressible MacDowell, seemed to be wrong. For Dumpy seemed to have the edge in every direction and Corrigan took the leavings. His car and his money and his flowers and dinners apparently didn't mean so much if the time she spent with each was any criterion.

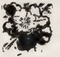
Dumpy not only had no money to speak of, but in his mad endeavor to hold the spotlight he was going in debt. Reliable reports were that a party he'd swung in Mexico had cost him three hundred berries, and he had a note at the bank for three hundred more. I was one of the signers. His insurance would 'tend to it, I figured.

The only times I saw Corrigan and Dumpy together were when shots were being taken at the field, and the feud sure could have given the mountaineers of Kentucky some points. Corrigan was all over Dumpy all the time. Every time Dumpy started talking flying, Corrigan would set him down. He humiliated the little geezer, taunted him, sneered at him.

"How many consecutive loops did you perform in the hotel lobby last night, or didn't you have an audience?" was a sample greeting.

Dumpy'd rage helplessly, dare Corrigan into the air with him and all that stuff. And to see them maneuver for the favors of this Darling woman was laughable in Dumpy's case and somehow contemptible in Corrigan's. He was about as expert at love making as a shad is at chewing tobacco. It made him look foolish.

I'd never have dreamed that a petty personal spite would turn him into a boorish bully and a simpering cake-eater at the same time, and I felt sorry. I'd liked the man.



THINGS got worse and worse as the time approached when the last strand of red tape would be unwound from that old DeHaviland and said crate be delivered for the slaughter. Not only was Dumpy's nearing attempt to crash the front pages via the suicide route getting so close that we couldn't help but think about it, but he himself was going to —— in a hand basket. His chances of coming out of that wreck unharmed were approximately those of a snail's dashing across Fifth Avenue at five in the afternoon in good health, but it looked as if he'd drink himself to death before he let a crashed DeHaviland catch fire with him.

Corrigan was spending money like water and evidently urging Dumpy on to outdo him. Between showing off to the movie folks and the world in general, trying to outdo Corrigan and squeezing the last drop of publicity out of his coming *soiree*, Dumpy was boiled to the ears most of the time, getting an unhealthily bright look in his eyes and dropping flesh by the pound. We finally broke a rule, and some of us tried to reason with him, but he was beyond reason. He was totally cuckoo, and one sneer from Corrigan would have outweighed all the flossy verbiage the rest of the flight could have dug up in a month.

All of which finished the job of making Corrigan a pariah. It wasn't too obvious, but all our respect for him was gone. I still held to the hope that there was something behind it all which might excuse the big fellow, somehow, and I had to admire the hard-shelled flyer's total obliviousness. Apparently his position didn't bother him at all. If there ever lived a bozo who could have lived happily by himself on a desert island it was him.

Finally Dumpy went to San Antone and got the ship, and when he landed in, he borrowed a hundred bucks from me to sling a last party. He was nervous, fidgety, his eyes bloodshot, and his nerves were jumping like so many grasshoppers. He could scarcely wait to get to town. Every living soul in McMullen, of course, was looking forward to the events of the morrow with all the anticipation they'd have for a hanging or any other social diversion of the sort. Barry felt that he'd wasted too much time as it was, and was anxious to get it over, so it had been broadcast to the world that the morrow was the day.

And of course, from one end of town to another Dumpy would be a marked man. It was his night to howl, and he was not the man to overlook any bets. I'd have taken one to ten that he'd propose at least ten toasts to his last night on earth.

I really expected that Kennard would take some steps to prevent the stunt coming off, but not a thing happened through the hot and humid evening nor the hotter and more humid morning which ushered in the day. And when ten o'clock came and Dumpy showed up, we all resigned ourselves to the fact that all was to happen as scheduled.

He was in pitiful shape. That party must have been a lulu, and hadn't helped him any. In addition, even he had sense enough to know that crashing a D.H. in the mesquite was something for any man to be frightened of. His eyes were bloodshot, his face flabby and white, and his hands quivered all the time.

All was ready just before noon. I was to fly the aerial cameraman again and was to take off first. As I taxied out on the field I saw the other boys crawling in their ships like whipped dogs. As for me, I could have taken Barry, Dumpy and Corrigan up ten thousand feet in a bag and dropped the whole three of 'em overboard.

SOUTHWARD over Mexico and eastward toward the Gulf heavy cloud-banks lay sullenly, and there was a feeling of a storm in the air. However, nobody suggested waiting. The border patrol flies in any weather, like the Air Mail, and besides, we were all anxious to get those movie people through and get them out of town before Dumpy, in case he was still among us, blew up and burst.

The first trip was a formation chasing Dumpy out over the mesquite. After a lot of aerial shots, we'd return, and then Dumpy'd crash in a field on the edge of the river. After cameras were set and all that, of course.

So off we went, northwest, Dumpy out in front about five hundred yards. We had to go about forty miles to get the wildest country, where the camera would show nothing but mesquite as far as the most phenomenal optic could operate. Each flyer had an actor, Corrigan carrying Vivian Darling. I had a cameraman, and when we reached our objective I was very busy with him, maneuvering around so he could get close shots of each ship, taking in the ground at the same time as the faces. All of which was to prove that the picture was on the level.

I've got to say one thing—the actors were game.

It was close, tricky work. Flying formation, fifty feet apart is no job for an amateur, and in addition, I had to sneak close to each ship for the pictures, get high for others taking in Dumpy, and various other matters of import.

I was so busy and so were the rest that we didn't watch the clouds that were rolling up on us. Where we were there were a lot of snowy cumulous clouds, but from south and east tremendous black rain clouds were rolling toward us. One of those quick Texas thunderstorms, so heavy they'd drown a man with one of these *retroussé* beaks. I knew it was getting close, but figured we'd fly around it.

We were sixty miles from home, over the trackless chaparral, when Kennard, flying Barry, gave the signal to turn back. By some uncanny means the storm had practically surrounded us. There was one opening northward, and we all made for that, flying wide open. My air-speed meter showed a hundred and thirty an hour.

I was diving a little, but the Liberty was sure stepping it off at no mean velocity on its own.

The formation had scattered. It was every man for himself. I could see Dumpy's white ship below me and to my right. We all had the same idea—slip through that hole, thence around the storm, to the east and back home.

The wind was getting terrific now, blowing into the storm. And as I looked down I could see the solid mass of rain that was pouring from that pile of dirty, gray mist. It looked black in the middle.

We got out of the middle of it, and I banked eastward. Dirty weather, mates, very dirty weather. For the storm extended from horizon to horizon as far as I could see, billowing in from the east and coming up from the south. There was nothing to it but to dive in and fly through or get forced endlessly northward.

I knew not what course others might take. The storm was coming like a house afire, the clouds piled at least twelve or thirteen thousand feet high. The wind was whipping my ton-and-a-half ship like a feather. But it would only be a few minutes, I figured. A thunderstorm doesn't take long to fly through.

In a second I was on the outskirts of the clouds, hurtling into the dead blackness within. One last look back showed the other boys scattering for the ordeal. The next second drops of rain were stinging my face like so many needles. An instant later everything was blotted out as the D.H., bellowing defiance, shot straight into the maw of the storm.

In less than a minute I knew that I was in the worst storm of my career. The churning mist was opaque. Sometimes I couldn't see the ends of my wings. The water made my goggles as useful as though they'd been made of wood. My face was a constant torture as each drop of rain, due to our speed, became a tiny stiletto stabbing into my skin.

The ground was out of sight—nothing but mist. It was impossible to keep level. At one second the air-speed meter would jump to two hundred miles an hour, and I'd blindly pull up. The goggles were fairly torn from my face as the ship skidded and slipped and bucked in the terrific air currents that were whirling into the vortex of the storm. The D.H. was thrown around like a chip in a whirlpool. Jagged streaks of lightning split the dead blackness every few seconds, and the crash of the thunder was like the voices of the gods of the storm. That D.H. which had seemed so mighty was only a plaything, at the mercy of the elements. The motor's roar was almost indistinguishable.

Blinded, tortured, fighting desperately to keep the ship level with my feet braced against the rudder and the stick in both hands to keep it from being wrested from me, I didn't know where I was going. The electricity in the storm made the compass useless. The altimeter changed a thousand feet in less than a minute, as upward or downward currents caught the ship and threw it as they listed. The ship was vibrating in every strut and spar, and the flying and landing wires were quivering so they looked ten times as wide as they were.

I found myself hurtling downward at more than two hundred miles an hour at one time, and once when I was straining my eyes to see a foot ahead, the ship stalled and fell off into a tail-spin that made me sick and dizzy, due to the clouds, before I could pull out. Without the ground to guide me I was helpless to keep the D.H. anywhere near level except by the speed meter and the feel of the wind on my face. At times we were cocked up on one wing while I fought to get the ship level, and the air currents laughed at me.

And all the time the savage pounding of the rain and the lightning that played around the ship in blinding light. Somewhere in that churning mass of mist, eight other ships were fighting blindly through, too.

I was cursing a steady stream as I thought of it all. Ever since that bunch of actors had arrived, bad luck had dogged our trail, and now it seemed that it was going to overtake us with a vengeance. This was no ordinary storm, but the sort of tempest that leaves ships scattered in its wake. It wasn't humanly possible that we could all get through all right, and down below there was nothing but mesquite to land in.

Then my heart turned three fast loops and I stuck the nose of my ship in the air just in time. Like a ghost-ship, a white DeHaviland, dirty gray now, came spinning down through the heart of the storm. It was whirling with dizzy speed, and missed me by less than fifty feet. Just a flashing second, and it was out of sight again.

It was Dumpy's ship, and all I could do was hope he was spinning it deliberately and thank God that he was alone. I felt in my heart, though, as I saw it disappear, that it was out of control. It was going too fast for a ship that had a man at the stick. Maybe, though, he was bent on trying to get down out of the storm and into the rain as fast as possible.

Optimistic as I tried to be, though, that spinning ship was the last straw for me. The world, as far as I was concerned, was a mess, and there was no merit in it.

IT SEEMED that the tempest was increasing in fury, if that was possible. I was utterly helpless and couldn't even handle my stick against the force of the storm. The rain was chewing the tips of my prop to pieces, and as it got out of balance, the Liberty was vibrating itself and the ship to pieces. Once I found myself in a dive so steep that after bracing myself and pulling with all my strength it took eight hundred feet to pull it out. The thunder was a continuous roll of mighty crashes now, and forked lightning split the blackness incessantly. The motor was indistinguishable, my face a raw, red mass of swollen blotches, the ship a quivering wreck in which something must give before long.

And what was happening to me must be happening to the others.

I thought it over and took my chance. I started diving terrifically, watching the altimeter. I was going to get as close to the ground as I could in case we had to go down out of control. I hoped against hope it would be visible when we got close to it. Nearly a mile high as I was, it seemed that the earth was non-existent, that the universe was nothing but swirling mist in which I was doomed to fight a hopeless battle forever, the puny plaything of a Gargantuan aerial whirlpool.

Then it seemed that the bellowing of the storm was lessening. I pulled level, or as near level as I could, as I sensed that the air currents were less powerful. My face was beyond feeling individual drops now, so I couldn't tell whether the rain was slackening. It was just a living sore. But ahead the dark mist seemed to be lightening, turning from black to gray, then to lighter gray, almost to white.

With a mighty roar of triumph the old DeHaviland hurled itself out of the grasp of the last streamers of mist, and into smiling sunlight that turned the endless soaked mesquite into a panorama of flashing, jewel-hung foliage.

I looked at my passenger. The fox-faced little cameraman, Hopkins, was a wreck, and his eyes were wilder than a loco bronc's when he's bucking. His face was untouched. I guess he'd just slumped down in the cockpit and waited blindly for whatever might happen.

Then, as my eyes swept the air and the ground, I sort of froze in my seat. Down below in the mesquite was a wrecked airplane, and it was white. Dumpy had crashed before he'd planned to.

At that second a soaking DeHaviland sort of fell out of the storm which was hurrying northward. 72—it was Corrigan, and in the back seat Vivian Darling had evidently fainted.

I hurried up to him and pointed downward. As he looked I scrutinized the ground for miles. No sign of life. Dumpy was in the wreck.

I looked over at Corrigan, who was gazing down at the man he had disliked with such venom. Then his helmeted head turned to me—he was about fifty feet away from me—and he pointed to me and then made circles with his finger. Then he pointed to himself, then south and then back to Dumpy.

It meant that I should circle over the spot to identify it in that trackless desert while he went for some kind of help. I had a ruined prop, a strained ship, weak muscles and an excellent chance of a forced landing within half an hour, but I couldn't leave Dumpy down there in the wilderness while I knew he might be alive. I gave Corrigan credit for having a plan, and he had a woman with him, too, who ought to get her feet on the ground. So I waved him on, and he sped south for the river to get his bearings. He, like my elongated self, could have no more idea of where he was than as though he'd landed on the moon by mistake

It wasn't a pleasant tour for me, with a dive into the mesquite at seventy miles an hour a strong possibility and pitiful, broken Dumpy below. That hour before Corrigan got back was the longest I ever spent.

Pop Cravath, left at the airdrome as O. D., was flying, and a peek at Corrigan in the rear told the tale. He had a parachute strapped to his back. He was going to jump into that mesquite. And brothers, diving from the Washington monument into a wash basin wasn't much worse, in those early parachute days.

I was in sort of a trance as the big flyer got up in his seat, leaning against the propellor blast, his hand on the ripcord. I knew he'd never jumped before. I'd jumped once, voluntarily, to prove to myself I had nerve enough to do it. When I got in the air I actually jumped because I was more scared to flunk it. But leaping into the air with a pack on your back that's supposed to open isn't a holiday. And into that thick mesquite.

I felt for him as he stood there, and Pop stalled the ship. Eyes shut, and doubtless the most complete, thorough and all-inclusive fear a man ever feels in his heart, he jumped into space with his eyes shut.

He fell like a rocket as I followed him down. Then the chute flared white in the air, and he was swinging terrifically beneath it. Close to the ground he began slipping the big umbrella by hauling on the shroudlines from harness to the umbrella, and he crashed, at fifteen feet a minute, directly into a mesquite tree.

He cut himself loose, and limped toward Dumpy. I saw he had a bag of some kind with him. Maybe he'd learned to be a rough and ready surgeon during some spot in his checkered career. I watched him dig into the wreck and carry Dumpy out. For a long minute he knelt over him, and then with sticks he made a big O. K. in a tiny treeless space.

I followed Cravath back to McMullen, feeling as if I'd just inherited some money and had four stiff drinks.

It was only forty miles, it proved, and already the other ships had returned in safety. Major Searles and Sleepy Spears were on their way to a field fifteen miles due south of where Dumpy had fallen, and other ships with men to carry him were warming up.

THEY got him home early next morning, unconscious from weakness and loss of blood, but he wasn't badly off otherwise. Corrigan had carried him nearly five miles before the others met him. A ship had marked his course to guide the searchers. The big flyer reported that Dumpy had come to long enough to admit that he'd got into a spin and simply went unconscious. That was due to his physical condition, of course.

Corrigan spent the whole day with him in the hospital, and next day, for some obscure reason, he invited me to go along. It was the first tumble he'd given any individual in the flight, except Dumpy.

And it didn't take five minutes with the two to discover that something had happened between them. There seemed to be real affection and a new humility in the weak Scarth's attitude. It was sort of a father and son effect, and Corrigan's usual bruskness held a softer note even in his more or less ferocious kidding. Dumpy was still cocky, irrepressible, and unconquered, but it was a healthier sort of attitude, and he knew just what a fool he'd been making of himself for once.

Finally Corrigan remarked:

"Dumpy, there's one thing I didn't mention. You weren't feeling so good yesterday. I cut in on this Darling woman because I figured she was making a fool of you, causing you to spend too much and maybe other complications—and I was sure I could because she's just a food pup willing to marry money."

Dumpy looked embarrassed, hesitated and finally his face expanded in a shamefaced grin.

"She stuck like a burr, and we had a lot of fun and all that, but it was really Laura Lee I wanted to vamp. Between that ham Fairman and Vivian I had to sneak around to see her. And—and that last party I gave I got pretty tight and got myself engaged, —— it!"

I laughed until my toenails cracked at the wobegone grin on Dumpy's face. And Corrigan, for the first time to my knowledge, let go. He snorted and belched and yelled and strangled. Finally he came to and said breathlessly—

"And me lying to Vivian about how much money I made and had, and her with a thousand dollar ring picked out!"

"How are we going to get out of it?" queried Dumpy lugubriously.

"I'll fix that," Corrigan told him grimly. "But what I want to know is why Vivian picked on you."

"I have the germ of an idea," I announced. "Barry knew we were all trying to tout Dumpy off, crashing that ship.

Maybe he wanted to complete his spell over Dumpy and counteract our influence by having an experienced vamp help horse him into it. I noticed they kept Dumpy away from us."

"That's it!" yelped Dumpy, and another pillar of his self-esteem was gone. She was always making a nervy hero out of me and talking about being a high-priced stunt man in the movies."

"Maybe she thought you were a prospect at that," grunted Corrigan.

Soon thereafter we left, and I was just interested enough in the finale of the battle between Corrigan and Dumpy to ask in a very subtle manner—

"You don't happen to want to maybe perhaps loosen up and tell me just what the deadly enmity between you and Dumpy was, and the whys and wherefores of the present brotherly love and affection, do you?" I inquired.

"Oh, nothing much," he returned. "I got to like the little devil in Laredo. He's so —— genuine and cocky and sincere. He couldn't hide his feelings if he wanted to, and his worst boasts he really thinks are well founded. Because I figured his mania for flying—the scientific end as well as the actual air work—would make him a big man in the Air Service some day if he gave himself a chance, I started to try and knock the small time stuff out of him. He's got a good head on him, and he's likable as —— except for his alibi stuff and his jealousy.

"I got under his skin in Laredo, and then here I figured enough public humiliation, added to his mistakes, might give him some needed sense and tone him down a bit.

"I talked it over with Kennard, and I guess it's done him some good. Incidentally, even if he hadn't been hurt, the Cap wasn't going to let him go up. Searles would have declared him unfit to fly, and kiboshed that stunt."

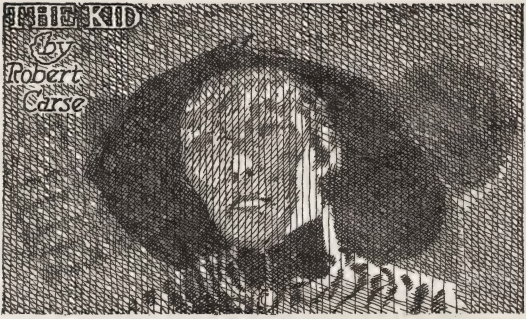
While I chewed that over, I took occasion to ask him what he was going to do about his and Dumpy's affairs of the heart.

"Spread the news, with everybody's cooperation, that Dumpy's crippled for life, for one thing," he grinned. "Something on the same order for me. Busted the painting hand or something. Maybe lost all my supposed money, too."

Apparently it worked. Nobody ever heard from the fair damsels again after they left town, so far as I know.

I got a lot of mental fodder out of the thing, and what tickled me especially was the way Corrigan had carried on in his bull-headed way, without thought or care of what anybody else in the world might think of what he was doing. He'd just taken it into his head to casually mangle and then reconstruct young Dumpy, and that was every bit of it.

Which all goes to show that no matter how hard you boil a good egg, the shell stays just as thin.



RAIN pelted in great hard drops at him, to run down inside the collar of his oilskins, soaking the clammy cotton shirt to his back. The "Kid" shuddered as he stamped up and down the forecastle head, his feet leaden with the weight of the rotten sea boots the steward had sold him from the slop chest. Pain of exhaustion numbed him, circled bands of steel around his head, making it throb dully. He flapped his arms against his sides as he stared out over the bow where the fog wraiths beckoned to the wallowing ship.

Wailing like a giant in agony, the ship's whistle shrieked in shrill bursts at the fog wraiths, then died away, to bellow again and again. He stumbled slowly across the narrow deck past the black bulk of the anchor winch, stubbing with the slop chest sea boots at the steam pipes. Leaning on the misted niggerhead of the winch, he watched the waves surge and tongue upward at the hawse-holes where the anchors hung like massive dead men from their chains.

With cold, raw hands he tried to soothe the brain throbbing, his sou'wester pushed back on his head. All day in the forepeak mixing red lead, stirring gummy paint while the reek of oil and old rope twitched at his stomach. Then the mate had given him four hours' lookout here in the wind and rain! The Kid straightened suddenly, blinking into the fog, eyes bright with anger. He was the Kid, all right. "That no-account ordinary," the old man had called him one day when he had dumped his soogey bucket down the bridge ladder. Two months of it now, since he had left home, since the ship had dropped down the beaten silver bands of the Columbia, plowed past the red brick huddle of Astoria and out into the Pacific. Two months of straining labor, of curses from the mate, from the boatswain, from the gang in the forecastle. Days of dragging work while he fuddled, clumsy with weariness, at the "small jobs" the boatswain gave him.

The "Kid"—"Red Nose" Mulcahey had dubbed him that the first day aboard when he pulled with frantic eagerness at the snarling steel hawsers as the ship backed out into the stream from Portland. They didn't like him, the gang back aft. They told him that he had taken a good man's job, and that "dirty, weak-kneed kids should stay ashore and leave the sea for men, for sailors." They cursed him and left him alone, except at chow time when he came aft from the galley under the weight of the great tin mess-kid. Then the night that he stumbled at the ladder head, tripped and fell to the hatch below, spilling beans, soup and meat across the deck, Mike the Greek, the forecastle bully, had slapped his head back and forth until he bled at the ears. When he was done, Mike had flung him against the sharp steel

"The Kid," copyright, 1925, by Robert Carse.

of the hatch coaming and promised him "a bloomin' good bootin' " if he did it again.

Here in the wind and wave whispering of the forecastle head he was alone, anyway. Here he could think things out and finger the broken-bladed paint knife he had found in a gear locker in the lazarette. The next time the Greek would get that—that for his promised "bloomin' bootin'." Fierce-eyed and tense, the Kid stood by the dripping steel of the anchor winch, the knife blade pressed against his thumb.

Tolling through the rain patter came the bells from the bridge. The Kid reached for the lanyard of the big forecastle head bell where it swung on the forepeak scuttle. He stroked six times, sending the deep notes clanging in the fog. He turned, throwing his head back, and drew a long breath.

"Li-ights are burning bright, sir!"

From the dim white arch of the bridge the mate's voice barked in reply, and the Kid continued his dragging pacing. Faint above the fog marshes the morning star climbed, winked and went out as dawn washed at the hem of the night mists. One bell sounded, and the Kid trudged down the foredeck into the alleyway to peep through the porthole at the sleeping mate, who lay breathing stentoriously. He clumped down the passage-way and hammered on the half open door.

"One bell, Mister! One bell before the watch, sir!" shouted the Kid.

"Get ta —— outa here!" bawled the mate, sticking a hairy leg over the bunk rim. The Kid nodded quickly, ducked out the door and across the deck to the carpenter's room, where he thumped and howled until he gained a grunting response. The acrid smell of the coffee urn came from the mess-room as he entered the forecastle, where the men snored behind the shadowy lines of clothing draping their bunks. He grasped Red Nose Mulcahey's outflung wrist and shook him softly. The Liverpool Irishman started up, eyes clotted with sleep under the tufted disorder of his red hair. One by one the men tumbled out on to the deck, shivering in the damp cold of the dawn, yanking swiftly at dungarees and shirts.

He pounded up the well deck ladder again and across the main deck where rain water puddled in the scuppers, lapping almost to the hatches. He dragged at the ladder rail, to reach the squared whiteness of the bridge. The young second mate stood in the door of the wheelhouse, sextant in hand, holding his pipe behind his back.

"Watch is called, sir," droned the Kid then shuffled down the ladder. From the galley came the plaintive chant of Hard-a-Lee, the Cantonese second cook who stood at the long range, his high, white cap drooped over one eye. He looked up as the Kid stopped in the doorway.

"You wantem Java, eh, Keed?"

"Givem one cup alla quick, Lee," said the Kid, fishing in his oilskins for his cigarets. The lanky Chinaman pushed the cup toward him, smiling understanding.

"—— sea no —— good, eh, Keed? Workem alla time, standem watch, soogey, chip deck, paint. No good life. Me—eighteen years on sea, twelve in fire room P. O. boat, Indian Ocean. No —— good, Keed, you leavem alone."

Hard-a-Lee talked over his shoulder at the Kid, squatting on the coal scuttle, as he moved back and forth in front of the range where three huge pans sputtered with frying eggs and ham. The Kid pulled at the frayed straps of his sea boots and nodded assent. With a final flip the Chinaman dumped the eggs in a brown-and-white clutter into the mess-kid, planked down the cover and swung it over to the Kid, who hefted it up and started across the deck for the forecastle. Mike, the Greek looked up as the Kid came into the mess-room with the steaming mess-kid held out before him. The hook-nosed sailing-ship man glared at him.

"You bring dat chow late. You make me late for wheel watch. De mate geef me —— las' night. I cut your heart out, you breeng heem late again."

Eyes fixed on the Kid, Mike, the Greek shaved at the wooden guard of the table with his sheath-knife. Red Nose Mulcahey grinned, showing gray, nicotined teeth.

"Mike, he thinks you're pretty good shark meat, Kid. Now get the chuck on the table. Break it out and don't stand there like a bridge officer. Sailormen like us wants our chuck fast and hot."

Red anger leaped at the Kid's throat, drove the sleep film from his eyes and bunched the raw fingers. He glared down at the gulping Greek who looked up as he felt the animus of the Kid's glance. The Greek rose to his feet, mess tin clutched in one hand.

"*Por bacco*, I cut your heart out, Keed!

You one no-good leetle wharf rat, an' I squash you jus' lak thees."

He gave graphic description with his fingers and a boiled potato while the men yelled with laughter. He dropped back to the bench, lowering his eyes to his plate. Lifting it high, the Kid whanged downward at the Greek with the huge tin mess-kid. Red Nose Mulcahey cursed in alarm and rolled under the table. The men scrambled away into the corners as the Greek raised himself, wiping the egg ooze from his face and hair.

Across the oilcloth of the table the Greek drove at the Kid, his knife gleaming. From the back of his jumper the Kid flashed his jagged weapon and slashed at the Greek's knife wrist. Blood jetted from his bare forearm as the swart sailor rolled writhing off on to the deck. Twice with fierce fury the Kid kicked at him. The Greek half rose to his knees, then slumped forward in a bloody heap.

"Bli' me, the Kid has done the Greek," said Red Nose Mulcahey softly, his eyes wide and staring.

"He'll kill ya, slit ya fore 'n aft when he's up again, Kid. Ya done it right, though. That's his knife wrist ya got, an' them sorta guys ain't no good without a knife. The beggar'll murder ya like as not in yer bunk. I'll tell the mate when I go for'ard. Don't want no bloody murders in this wagon."

Red Nose hitched excitedly at his belt and pushed a way through the crowd for the Kid. Out on the welldeck the Kid flung his hand outward to toss the knife into the sea, nausea flooding through him. A hand grasped his shoulder and spun him around. Hard-a-Lee, the Cantonese, stood beside him.

"No can do, Keed. You keepem knife alongside alla time. No—Grick sailor, he carve you lak Jap *hari-kari*. He's no good fellah. I watch you alla time, see?"

Hard-a-Lee raised the end of his long cotton shift to show the wooden haft of a six-inch blade tucked in the waist band of his dungarees. Once more he patted the panting Kid and went slowly up the ladder, the heels of his straw slippers slapping. The men stood looking with curious awe from the door of the forecastle as the Kid pushed through to his bunk. He jerked off boots, shirt and woolen cap, slipping off into a troubled dream when he crawled between the rough blankets.

THE men eyed him with a new, strange respect when he stood behind them at midday mess handing out the smoking curry and rice. Mike the Greek was a sailing-ship man and had tried to run the forecastle in square rig manner. Now the moon-faced, stumbling ordinary had squared things with the Greek. Let the Kid and Mike have it out when the Greek was ready, it was none of their affair. With this, the forecastle mob dismissed the question.

Days of sun-splashed splendor as the ship lumbered on to Liverpool and the Greek's arm healed. His old, assertive way was gone. Chow time he sat in a corner of the bench against the bulkhead, growling curtly for what he wanted, eyes always on the Kid. Nights on the forecastle head in the moonlight, the Kid saw those eyes burning at him as he and the Greek fought pantingly for possession of the jagged paint knife. If the Greek would only say something, curse him, make some threat, some gesture! But he sat there against the mess-room bulkhead, nursing his stub pipe, glaring steadily. During one fog-filmed dawn he told Hard-a-Lee his fears as the Chinaman bent over the sizzling pans of eggs and salt ham. Hard-a-Lee turned from his pans, shoving back the drooping cap.

"You alla time feah Grick, eh, Keed? Yaas, alla time, Grick feah you like one belly big debbil. He no touch you any time again, you savvy, He 'flaid a you."

Hard-a-Lee battered the top of the mess-kid into place and the Kid started on his journey across the glistening main deck for the forecastle. In the mess-room Mike, the Greek sat chewing at his stub pipe, his bandaged arm outstretched, glowing eyes watching the slight form of the Kid as he moved from plate rack to table and back.

That night the shrill of the mate's whistle brought the Kid to the bridge from his lookout in the bow.

"Get the old man and be snappy about it. Tell him the glass is goin' down to the keel!"

"Yessir," answered the sleepy-eyed Kid, and ducked down the ladder again. His hammering was answered by the old man, who padded cursing across the cold deck in bare, pink feet.

"What! What da ya mean? Mate sends for me! What kinda mates I got anyhow? Don't know no more than to call a man on a night like this! Blast his eyes. What? Yes, yes, I'll be up!"

He slammed the door, swearing harshly to himself. As the Kid staggered across the lurching foredeck, the wind swooped howling from the cloud banks and tore at the ship. Waves cascaded in fury on the decks, ripping loose the tarpaulins from their battens, smashing at the life-boats with ripping tentacles of spray. Straining in every bulkhead, the ship rose to meet the wave mountains, seas sloshing from her scuppers. The mate's whistle blast called the Kid to the safety of the bridge where the captain stood wrapped in his long watch coat, cap poked over his nose.

Dawn filtered gray through the masses of burgeoning clouds, and still the waves pounded at the steel hulk with hammering blows and the tarpaulins on the two forward hatches flapped wildly. Noon came and the wind spent itself in hurling long, gray rollers at the careening ship, lurching her like a water-soaked barrel.

The mate and the boatswain crawled forward on a life-line, heads bent against the sprays, to where the loose tarpaulins ballooned and slapped. They yanked off two hatch boards and the boatswain went below. He reappeared, to have the mate follow him into the hatch. The mate scowled with worry when he puffed on deck again. Hands cupped to his mouth, he shouted up to the captain standing at the bridge rail.

"Dunnage in Number One has slipped and that loose cargo in the upper 'tween-decks has gone over to starboard. That lousey stevedore boss didn't put no shiftin' boards in both hatches!"

"Git yer men below an' straighten the bloody thing out, then, Mister!"

Stiff and weary from the night's labor, the men clumped forward and got gear and tackle for a pulley-hauley. Then they filed down the steel ladder into the chaos of the 'tween-decks where boxes and crates piled in a jagged mound against the starboard bulkhead.

"Now earn yer chuck, me salt-sea stiffs!" yelled Red Nose Mulcahey, stripping off his jumper and shirt, exposing the tri-colored barkentine swooping across the hairy expanse of his chest. They formed in a sweating line to drag the cases to the center of the hatch where the boatswain and the mate shared them up in rows again. From the hatch rim Mike, the Greek used his good hand to direct the pulley-hauley rope. Red Nose bellowed a chantey as they hoisted the smashed cases on deck. Dragging at the rope, the men joined in the chorus—

"Oh scupper the mate an' sink the hooker, sung Abel Brown the sailor!"

At seven bells on the afternoon watch they had the two hatches almost squared up. Mike, the Greek leaned over the hatch mouth and yelled down to the toiling mate.

"Storm cloud showin' nor' b' east, Sir. Mus' go *muy pronto* eef you weesh to stow eet before she come!"

Shoulder to shoulder, four of them shoved the last great case into an angle of the shelter deck. The mate sent his flashlight dancing through the gloom, then looked up at the square of light above.

"Get on deck an' start throwin' them hatch covers on fast. Kid, you stay here an' get the pulley-hauley tackle from the Greek."

The mate handed his flashlight to the Kid, crawled over the cases through the manhole and up the ladder to the deck, followed by Red Nose Mulcahey and the rest of the men. The shaggy silhouette of the Greek's head popped over the hatch rim.

"Where you are, Keed?" he shouted.

The Kid flicked on the mate's flashlight to show his position. The Greek leaned far out over the hatch edge and hurtled the steel block downward at the spot of light. The Kid jumped from its path, slipped and fell sprawling as the block smashed against his thigh with a grinding crunch. He tried to crawl to his knees, to cry out, but gasped throatily and fainted.

The smell of chloroform was heavy about his bunk when he emerged from the haze which encompassed him. He peered over the side of the bunk, Hard-a-Lee sat beside him on the bench, sewing a patch on his dungarees. He looked up at the Kid.

"Alla same bettah, now, hey? Grick fellah, he tly keel you. Hees belly bad fellah. You sleepem alla same long time lak thees. No one see Grick fellah throwee block. Me sabby him alla same. Bad fellah, Grick."

Hard-a-Lee's monotone died away suddenly as the captain and the chief mate entered the forecastle. The captain dropped his first aid case into a bunk and examined the bandages swathing the Kid's broken leg. The mate questioned him slowly, painstakingly about the accident. White-faced and strangely calm, the Kid answered. He had been in the hatch, waiting to stow the pulley-hauley gear. The Greek had shouted from on deck, then the block had come smashing down; that was all he knew. The bow-legged mate sat on a bunk edge, pulling nervously at his long nose, his eyes on the captain.

"Ain't nothin' we can do, is there, Sir? Mike, the Greek has got a bum arm, an' the Kid here give it to 'im. The Greek mighta dropped the block sorta careless-like, seein' he ain't got any love for the ordinary. An' again, the Kid's no sailor an' he might not 'a stood clear when the Greek sung out to stand clear below. Jus' might as well let the whole thing slide, an' log it as an accident. That's my way o' thinkin', Sir. Ain't I right, Mister?"

The captain snapped shut his first aid case and nodded. Hard-a-Lee sidled into the forecastle as the two officers crossed the well-deck. He sat for a moment staring at the toe of his rattan slipper.

"Keed, I feex heem, thees Grick fellah. I feex heem belly good. You sabby?"

The Chinaboy searched the Kid's face, his eyes shining like polished ebony. From under the straw bundle of his pillow the Kid dragged out the jagged paint knife.

"No can do, Lee. Alla same, when my leg is good—I'll get this Greek feller. Changey for changey, you savvy, Lee. You're a good boy, Hard-a-Lee!"

The Kid stretched out his hand and squeezed the Chinaboy's shoulder. Hard-a-Lee got to his feet and stood looking down at the wan Kid. He shook his head quizzically and shuffled down the alley way, muttering softly to himself.

Liverpool, Brest, Le Havre, Marseilles, from his bunk the Kid heard the crew talk of the night life fascinations of each one as the weeks fled and his leg knitted. In Le Havre one night when the crew were ashore and the Kid lay dreaming in his bunk, listening to the lap of the waves against the quarter, Mike, the Greek staggered into the forecastle alley way, singing a ribald dance hall tune of the Boca. The Kid crawled back against the bulkhead, clutching the paint knife. Swaying to and fro, his checkered cap perched on the back of his head, the Greek stood in the doorway.

"Ha, ha, Keed! Some day soon, me—Mike, the Greek, cut your heart out—*comme ça*, see?"

He slashed at an imaginary form with his knife. Silently the Kid watched him. Down the alley way came the *pit-pat* of straw slippers. The Greek started, sputtering curses. Hard-a-Lee slouched against the bulkhead, his knife point caressing the back of the Greek's neck.

"Grick fellah, I keel you alla same Jap! Getta out! —— !"

He slid the knife point gently across the Greek's throat, leaving a faint red line of starting blood. The Greek backed into the alley way, tripped out on deck and fled forward. All night long Hard-a-Lee sat beside the tossing, moaning Kid, who clutched with hot hands at the bunk rail.

CHRISTMAS came and went as the ship ferried around the Golfo di Napoli from Naples to Spezzia and back, discharging her cargo of grain from the States while the Kid learned to walk once more. Koo-Jan, the officers' mess boy brought aft the news to the Saturday night poker game that the ship was bound for Lisbon to load cork for home. Four days later the Kid sat on the flying bridge shining the topside binnacle as the empty ship trundled Lisbon-bound, past the white buildings of the Lloyd's station, cluttered at the foot of Gibraltar. The young third mate stood beside the Kid, his glasses trained on the towering, dun rock.

"They must think we're an awful tub, Kid. We're standin' outa the water like an empty coal barge. Git them flags off the halyards now and finish up yer polishin' before chow time."

The third mate dropped down the ladder on to the bridge, leaving the Kid to tug at the bright-hued flag signals bellying overhead. He stuffed the varicolored roll of bunting under his arm and clambered stiffly down to the bridge. He stood for a moment in the doorway of the wheelhouse. Mike the Greek slouched over the compass, one knee braced against a wheel spoke. He glanced quickly toward the third mate standing in the wing of the bridge, then glared at the Kid. He raised his arm, forming his fingers into a talon.

"Wharf rat! You see thees arm? Hees well now. Ver' soon I get you in Lisbona. There I carve you into leetle beets an' sell you for bait to fishairmens!"

So it would end in Lisbon thought the Kid as he clattered down the passageway to the galley door by the after-break of the main house. Hard-a-Lee had been baking, and the place smelled of fresh bread and pie. Fukasha Moe, the rotund chief cook, handed the Kid the forecastle mess-kid and continued peeling his bucket of potatoes.

At mess the men talked of Lisbon and the chances of drawing half their pay. Red Nose Mulcahey, who was on the chief mate's watch, stated that he had been told that they were bound for Philadelphia to discharge. The Kid waited on them silently, his mind filled with the Greek's threat. Before him loomed the vision of the Greek standing over him, cleated boot heels upraised to blot his brains out. During the bluster of the next two days, as they rolled in the open water of the Atlantic, the vision recurred again and again.

The sky was fire-shot gold as the ship circled off the mouth of the Rio Tagus. Between low, green hills, which stretched behind bluff headlands, the river led the ship inland. Dusk lowered over the white city as the pilot spun over the handles of the bridge telegraph, ordering half speed. The squat freighter nosed in among the lanes of nondescripts, chafing at their anchors opposite the city. Megaphone in hand, the captain shouted his orders from the bridge and the two bow anchors plunked into the ocher stream.

The steam pipe in the wash room crackled and snapped as the men heated their shaving water and got cleaned up to go ashore. Resplendent in a striped green shirt and fedora hat, Mike the Greek twirled his mustaches in front of the cracked mirror. The Kid, still in paint-stained dungarees and jumper, sat on his upturned water bucket fingering a cigaret stub. Red Nose Mulcahey surveyed the pair slyly, a smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes.

"You ain't goin' ashore, eh, Kid? I sorta think it would be healthier for ya ta stay aboard. The stevedores jus' come on now, an' they're throwin' the cork into her fast. You watch the Greek when he comes back aboard. He'll have a nose full o' cognac. Hit wit' a marlin spike or a splicin' maul. Whatever ya use, make sure, cause he's out ta get ya right."

Red Nose wagged his head, straightened his string tie and hastened after his watch mate who stood at the taffrail bickering with a jabbering boatman. The Kid leaned over the rail amidships, watching the light festoons sparkle up in the city, where tram cars crawled like golden worms through the night. Winches clattered and muttered from forward where the *paysano* stevedores worked the cargo into the hatches. From the shadowy depths of the holds the workers chanted a guttural song as they yanked the cork bales into place. The Kid went up the ladder to the boat deck and crouched down against a life-boat davit, watching the swift, sure movements of the hatch-tender as he guided the bobbing bales down into the yawning darkness of the 'tween decks. The Kid shivered as he dozed in the river mist, lulled to sleep by the chantey of the *paysanos*.

"Ah, don't argue wit' de bloody Portuguesa! Tell him to shove off. He got our last bit o' dough. *Vamose*, son of a swine!"

The Kid started up. That was Red Nose Mulcahey all right. Clustered at the bottom of the gangway ladder, the forecastle mob were arguing vehemently with the boatman. A foot lashed out of the shadows and crunched into the face of the gesturing boatman. The tide rip caught the round-bowed boat and swung her off down stream as the mob jeered in triumph. Mike the Greek staggered up the ladder, the mob shouting and singing at his heels.

The Kid got to his feet, stretching stiffened muscles. He tested the edge of the paint knife against his thumb. Now was the time to settle things with the Greek! His jaw muscles formed into hard, taut knots as he slipped through the puddle of light at the forecastle door. A brown bottle stood in a pool of cognac on the mess table. Fingers clasping a tin cup, Mike the Greek sprawled over the table, head on his arms in sleep.

The Kid pulled out the paint knife, his breath coming in short, deep gulps. There was the place to strike, right between the shoulder blades. He crooked his arm upward, then dropped it slowly. No, that was the way the Greek would do it. He leaned across the table and slapped the sleeping man over the head.

"Mike, you dirty Greek swab!"

The sailor looked up stupidly, then slumped his head on the oilcloth again. The Kid stood for a moment looking at him, turned and went out of the forecastle into the dawn.

"C'mon, break out, you hogs! We shove off tonight an' there's *beaucoup* work to polish off afore then."

Swearing cheerfully at them, the boatswain marshaled them forward. Red Nose pounded the Kid on the back.

"Still here, eh, Kid? Ain't done for the Greek, have ya? Tha's right. Don't want ta have no murders in the focsle. Allus puts the ole man off his feed. Bli' me, it's bloomin' cold!"

The hours dragged as they heaved at the great bow hawsers, sagging them down through the forepeak scuttle. Mate and boatswain pulled with them as the molten fire of the sun fled before the darkness. Under the glare of the masthead lights they stowed cargo runners, blocks and deck tackle. The mate looked at his watch.

"All right! Good. Now stand by fore and aft an' we'll get this hooker outa here!"

Red Nose looked up from the wire he was coiling. He waved a hand toward the glimmering light cluster of the city.

"Say *adios* to her buckoes. We're pullin' the hooks now and ye'll have many a month on Sou' Street afore ye'll see 'em again!"

THE captain's whistle shrilled from the bridge, where he stood with the harbor pilot. The men hammered the hatch battens into place and the forward gang straggled up the deck to where a pair of slim tugs fretted at the bow.

"Give them tugs their lines an' send two o' your scum below to stow the chains" yelled the old man. The mate plucked at the visor of his cap. The Kid stood by the forepeak scuttle, coiling down a heaving line. Mike, the Greek sat mumbling drunkenly on one of the bitts.

"Blast yer eyes, Greeko! You still full? Git below with the Kid an stow them chains. That'll sober you or I'm an Ioway farmer!"

Mike grumbled answer and slouched down the forepeak ladder. The Kid followed him as the carpenter started the anchor winch and the steam began to burble in the pipes. Mike fumbled for the light switch at the head of the chain locker manhole and an incandescent bulb glowed overhead. The blast of the old man's whistle and the answering shout of the mate came faintly from above.

The winch jerked into action and the great anchor chain began to clink through the hawse-pipe at them. The Kid looked around him quickly. This was the first time he had ever had the chain locker job. He had heard the A. B.'s grumble about the "lousey chain locker trick" and now he saw why. He and the Greek stood in a narrow steel cell, through the top of which snaked the mud-bedaubed anchor chains. Mike, the Greek glared at him.

"You watch me, wharf rat, and don' fall down or catch feengairs in dose chain links or it ees all ovair for you. W'en we are done, I teenk I keel you lak dirty wharf rat you are. Now, heave 'way!"

He reached out at the stinking steel links, dragging the chain across the length of the locker and back again. Following his lead, the Kid jerked at the slippery chain, his fingers sliding in the thick slime of the harbor bottom. Like a gigantic snake the great chain clanked down to them where they panted with open mouths, pulling the links back and forth in long bights. The Kid raised his head to shake the sweat from his face and found the red-rimmed eyes of the Greek fixed on him. The Greek had been drinking all day and was badly spent, he could see that.

They crouched as they worked now for the offshore anchor was in, and the winch panted as it hauled the port anchor inboard. The Greek stopped for a moment, leaning against the slimed bulkhead as he tore with muddy fingers at the throat of his jumper. The Kid strained at the looping, treacherous chain. The Greek grunted with exhaustion as he joined him. They forced the clanking links into a corner and started back to the center of the locker.

A hoarse cry came from the Greek. The Kid dropped the chain to look. The sleeve of Mike's dungaree jumper was caught between two links of the chain. Tensing with all his force, the Greek tried to tear loose. The ever-increasing weight of the chain flung him flat on his back. Wild-eyed with fright, the Kid stared at him. He searched the lining of his waistband for his knife. It was gone, dropped somewhere in the mass of steel beneath them! His fingers bloody and numb, he tore at the stout jumper sleeve while the Greek looked at him with fear-whitened eyes. He yelled hoarsely in the din of the place and pointed at the chain, coiling upward into a pile of deadly metal in the center of the locker. The Kid sprang at it, pulling feverishly, while his muscles creaked and burned.

Head bent to his knees, he staggered in his march across the locker, panting through the mud that filmed his face and body, nauseated by the foul stench. Wavering wildly, he dragged at the links, keeping them always from the corner where the Greek lay coiled like a broken doll. Blood mounted in surging waves to his brain, his breath scorched his throat, his heart thumped with immense blows. He clawed at the rasping stream of steel with battered hands, reeling blindly, aware always of the crumpled, whining heap in the corner. This huge steel thing rattling at him, munching at his fingers, breaking his back, must be kept from the wailing shape in the corner, from—Mike, the Greek, his enemy, or it would squash his life out. The Kid raised his head, sobbing for breath, pawing numbly at the chain. A dull blow clanged echoes through the murk of the locker. The anchor was in, the steel snake had stopped! The Kid crawled on raw knees to where the Greek lay babbling with fear.

"Mike—Mike!"

"Yes, Keed!"

"Mike, ya all right?"

"Yes, Keed."

"Wait—wait!"

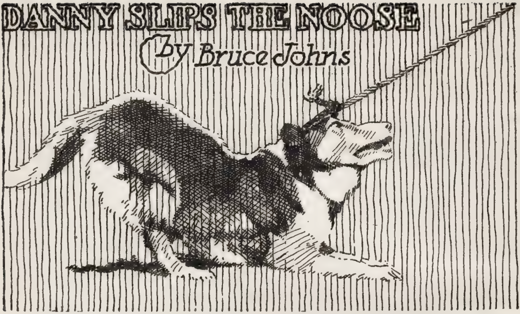
He fumbled up the ladder rungs into the fore peak. Red Nose Mulcahey gaped at him from the door of the paint locker. The Kid mouthed with numb lips, pointed to the man-hole, then slipped and fell against the battered side of the red lead tin.

The light bulb in the forecastle blinked and danced like a firefly at him. The Kid sat up in his bunk. Across the forecastle the steward in his white jacket daubed with an iodine-soaked rag at the Greek's shoulder. The Kid straightened up as the steel gray eyes searched his face. The Greek leaned over the bunk rim.

"Keed—I call you dat seence you come aboard. Dat's wrong. You, Keed—you bettair man than me!"

DANNY SLIPS THE NOOSE

by Bruce Johns



Author of "Big 'Un," "Boe the Spectacular."

THEY were going to shoot Danny down behind the barn.

It wouldn't be possible to hang him for the murderer they thought he was, because he had such a big neck that he slipped his collar every time he was tied up to the cowshed.

Preparations for the shooting were being made without much formality. Jim Foster was to lead Danny down there away from the children, turn his big brown eyes away and pull the trigger of the .44 just behind the left ear.

The foreman was trying to rush things a bit, because if "Windy" Carrol, who owned Danny, came back from town sober they'd never get away with it.

"Lissen to me, Jim," said "Hefty" Thompson, "I'm foreman o' this dump o' a ranch, and when I say a derg's gotta get it, I mean it. Now, you drop them harness and get goin' on this thing. I don't aim to have no sheep killin' an'mal alive 'round here."

"Aw right," muttered Jim, "but you allus stick these dirty jobs on me. We don't know fer sure this derg chawed thata sheep. He's a nice ole' derg at that. There's lot others 'round here might o' done it. An' besides, what's Windy goin' to say to me fer doin' it?"

"Well, when the derg's daid, he's daid; ain't he? Let Windy rave. Don't care whose derg it is when it kills my sheep."

"Well, you might o' made your decision a little sooner, Hefty. Windy'll be here any minute now, an' you know it. Let's let it go 'til he's gone some other day. Suppose he runs with it to Jedge 'Mebbe' Merrill and bellyaches a lot? You know Merrill's kind o' ticklish on this sort o' thing—shootin' other people's dergs."

The foreman groaned and threw a saddle savagely upon a rack.

"Ever since I bin in this —— Miraculo valley I've heard nothin' but Jedge Mebbe Merrill, and what he might do. Why that old soak never does nothin', Jim, an' you know it, 'cept take a drink at the wrong time. The only case he ever did justice to was twelve bottles. Why you scairt o' him?"

"Ain't scairt o' nobody," replied Jim. "But I'm tellin' you right now, Hefty, I don't like this job."

"Scairt to shoot a derg. That's you. Think mebbe Windy'll crab to the Jedge! Why everybody says Windy an' the jedge ain't hardly spoke fer twenty year."

"Yes, I know all 'bout it—an' more'n you do. A li'l school teacher named Katy McClure made 'em thata way twenty year ago. They don't say much, but they think they hate each other."

"They'll get drunk together an' shoot each other all up sometime, mebbe," added Hefty.

"Mebbe, me eye, too. They jus' fussin' one another all this time 'cause they never get together. They ain't still mad 'bout that Katy McClure. Neither got her. But they jus' got fightin' 'bout it. Why ef anybody jus' get 'em by the necks an' led 'em up to a couple drinks side by each and told 'em to shake an' ferget it, they would—and lap the stuff. Say, them guys is jus' crazy to be frien's. Jus' wait 'til they get stewed together onct."

"They've had lot o' chances to drink together, them two."

"Yes, but they won't jus' get over the same bar. Ef one comes in, the other leaves. Windy's hangout is Castro's an' Merrill's is Big Joe's. The jedge loves liquor better'n anythin' in the world, too. I seen him a dozen times go out at recess in court and then have to postpone decision 'cause he forgot all 'bout the case. But nobody cares. What he tries ain't usually no 'count anyway—just small claims court—an' everybody likes him, 'cept Windy. An' everybody likes Windy, 'cept the jedge. You on'y bin here couple months. You'll learn."

"Well, never mind givin' me gab. You ain't goin' to turn my mind from shootin' thata mutt."

"Yes? Well, the jedge is up to the house now, talkin' to the boss, an' I don't think I'm shootin' no derg today. That ain't in no reg'lations I was employed by."

He turned and stood looking down the road.

"Yes," went on the foreman, "I suppose you want orders from the King o' England, the Prince o' Wales and the President o' the United States 'fore you do anythin'!"

"No I don't neither, but I ain't goin' to be caught shootin' a guy's derg when that guy's comin' in the gate."

Thompson swung around and his chin fell as he saw the old shay coming down toward the barns in a cloud of dust.

"Whoppin' potato bugs!" he rasped. "He's back early an' sober. Well, all right, I'll put it up to the jedge myself right now, 'though I don't think he's got a —— thing to do with it. But seems on'y thing you guys'll lissen to. You trot up an' ast him to come down."

"Aw right. Everybody takes the jedge's word fer things. He butts into everythin'. Half the things he tries ain't things the law says go into courts."

He waddled away toward the big house.

"Get down, you Windy," snapped the foreman, "an' lemme see you walk 'long this path without fallin' into the pansies."

Windy leaped from the wagon and walked foot over foot on the very edge of the path.

"You're a fine liar o' a fella with your insinuations," he laughed.

Then, standing straddled-legged in the center of the gravel walk, he placed his hands behind his back and launched into one of the speeches that had gained for him his nickname.

"What's jumpin' 'bout in your craw, Hefty? You're mad as a young bee. Your collar's got a hot box—"

"Aw, dry up, Windy. I got business on with the jedge."

Windy stiffened at the name. His thin, iron jaw came out suddenly to a point, the creases came between his bushy eyebrows and his long, lean legs straightened. He didn't look his fifty years when he was angry.

They turned and saw the judge walking slowly down the path.

Judge Merrill was an old sheep man, too. Years ago he had opened a corral at the railroad junction where owners paid heavily to have sheep fed while awaiting shipment. He had taken on a beard with his prosperity and years had added stooped shoulders and dimmed vision. He was round and slow and slovenly now—past sixty and a judge by popular vote. His nose beamed ahead of him like a carnation.

THE foreman, trailed by Carrol, went forward to meet him.

"Jedge," he said, pointing toward Danny, "we caught that derg early this mornin' beside a dead lamb that was all chawed up. He had blood down his vest an' 'round his mouth. I think we ought to get rid o' him in the reg'lar fashion."

"My derg?" gasped Carrol.

"Mebbe," said the judge, ignoring Windy.

"Well, I've got your O. K. on it?"

"Mebbe."

"Then Jim can take him back o' the barn and let him have it?"

"Mebbe."

"For the love o' Ophelia! Mebbe what?"

"Mebbe yes, an' mebbe no."

"Well, give me an answer one way or the other, can't you?"

"That," said the judge solemnly, "is fer the law to do."

"Good jay birds! Go to court over a derg!"

"Mebbe—if you want to shoot him. He ain't yourn, I take it. Where's the an'mal? Bring him up."

Danny's chain was unhitched from the barn door and he was led forward. Judge Merrill squinted down at the dog through carefully wiped glasses.

"——!" he snorted suddenly, "that's this fella Carrol's an'mal!"

"You bet he's mine," bristled Windy.

"He looks like a killer," bristled the judge in turn.

"Then I can bump him?" asked the foreman.

"I guess not!" roared Windy. "This ain't no court. Merrill ain't got no right outa his——court!"

"*Jedge* Merrill," corrected his honor with a tight mouth.

"You ain't in no court," repeated Windy.

"But he kilt my sheep!" interrupted the foreman.

"You're a prevaricator!" yelled Windy.

He shook his fist under the foreman's nose.

"That derg," he bellowed, "ain't kilt no lambs, I tell you. He don't do that sort o' thing! I won't have you say it, by——!"

"I'll say what I want," shouted Thompson. "I'll say more with my fist if you keep yourn under my nose a minute longer!"

"I'll take you!" yelled Windy.

"That'll do from you," said the judge. "I'll have you understan' I'm discussin' a case an' you'll get fine o' 'bout month's wages fer contempt o' court in 'bout one minute. What you think o' that?"

What Windy thought he didn't say. He walked away and went to the old dog. He looked at the big soft coat, saw the blood on his breast and, thrusting his hand under his chin, pulled back the skin about his mild eyes and stared into them.

"This ole fella," he said quietly, "ain't got no killer in his eyes. What you goin' to do 'bout that?"

"I'm goin' to shoot him. That's what I'm goin' to do 'bout that!"

"The——you are! Where's this dead lamb? I'll bet you my month's pay this is coyote blood an' his own on this shepherd, and you'll fin' a——dead coyote somewheres near."

"What makes you think that?" asked Hefty.

"Cause part o' this blood on his vest is his own, and it comes from a gash in his throat. Ef you ever seen a lamb give a derg a bite like that I'll buy you a keg o' beer all fer yourself, an' stand 'round an' watch you drink it."

They walked over to where Jim held the dog and surveyed the wound.

"Well, that might be an old one reopened," said the foreman stubbornly. "It would reopen if it was fairly new and he had to work to kill the sheep."

"——'s fire!" yelled Windy.

"Absolutely no——'s fire," said the judge severely.

"I seen a derg bleed to death, onct from an ole wound reopened," argued Windy. "You're agin this derg 'cause when he was young he was a lot o' trouble an' one day scairt a hoss you was on and spilt you. Mebbe I'm right too!"

"Mebbe you're not!" snapped the judge. "To prove I ain't agin your——derg, I'll give him a reg'lar, fair trial at the court. How's that?"

"Oh, O. K. with me," said Hefty wearily, "an' jus' to prove my point I'll send out a couple o' the boys with Jim to see if they can find any dead coyote."

They settled down, fed the horses and wandered around not looking at each other, while three of the boys went off with Jim to trot over the hills.

A half hour later three of the herders returned with word that no coyote could be found. Jim, they said, had gone off into the western coulee. It was the trail that led toward Tom Reilly's ranch, and Jim was sweet on Tom's daughter—and that was that.

"Aw right, let's get goin', since they's got to be a trial," said the foreman. "Let's jus' pack the derg and all into the wagon and go to town. It's Sat'day aft, anyhow."

GOING down to town, Hefty drove the shay, the judge rode his horse and Windy sat in back of the wagon with the head of the old dog on his knees. Carrol was thinking with his mind in a whirl. A look into Danny's big eyes was enough for Carrol to render an acquittal.

But with the judge he knew it would be another story. It would take a trick to save the life of Danny. Good old faithful Danny; old, tired boy with wrinkles around his eyes just like his boss. Windy thought and thought. The heat beat down as if they were traveling under a giant magnifying glass. Slowly Windy's mind turned to Carlo's glittering glasses of beer. A tall glass, beads on the side, cold foam on one's mustache.

Um!

Suddenly he gripped the dog's bushy head and muttered breathlessly in his ear. He smiled.

"I got it, boy. I got it. I know a way out, by ——!"

A WORD that a dog was to be tried for murder went fast around little Dos Cañons, and long before Judge Merrill had made his official appearance, every saloon in town was empty, the games had stopped and more than fifty of the boys had piled into the little courtroom behind the general merchandise store.

There wasn't a man in Dos Cañons that didn't know of the love Windy bore for that dog and that which Danny bore for his boss.

"He'll fight like —— fer thata derg," said Charlie Morse, barkeep. "It ought to be good fun to see him mix with that tough-tempered Hefty. Windy don't care for no foremen. He's studied a law book onct, he got by mail, too. An', oh boy, how he hates the Jedge!"

"There may be somethin' in this story Windy's got 'bout the derg jumpin' a coyote," said Hoots Gee, veteran herder. "The derg usta be the toughest an'mal in forty miles, and mebbe he's got a shot o' monkey glands or somethin' in his old age."

The sun was beating down with a viciousness, and inside the spectators soon removed shoes and shirts. It was August, the dry, dusty August of one of California's hottest valleys.

"Court is opened," called Judge Merrill from the bench. "An' you fellas back there'll hurl them stogies an' cigs out the window so as we kin get a decent breath o' God's own air. Also some o' you kin put your shoes back on fer the same very good reason. Where's the derg?"

"Right here. I got him," said Windy, sitting below the bench.

"Mebbe let him stay there. Now this court is arraignin' Windy Carrol's derg, Danny, fer killin' a lamb on Mr. Phelp's place where Hefty Thompson is foreman. Stand up, you Thompson. Swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothin' but the whole truth, s'help you God?"

Thompson arose and nodded.

"Git on the chair there and tell us your say. You fellas ain't got no lawyers 'bout you anywheres? Eh? Aw' right. Let's hear it, Thompson."

The foreman took the chair and looked down at the dog and Windy Carrol below.

"I want it understood," he began, "that I ain't got no grudge agin no derg. Thisa one, I think, is a killer an' ought to get bumped; but a derg is just a derg, an' while you can't blame him fer killin', mebbe, when he does he ain't no good no more an' ought to be put out o' the road.

"We found this derg early today 'side the body o' a lamb. He had blood on his vest, in his mouth and all over him. The lamb had been killed, that was plain 'nough. That's all we got to say. The derg ain't been caught at it 'fore, but we had a lot o' sheep kilt this summer like this."

He stepped down. Several of the ranch hands followed him and told practically the same story.

"Looks as like this derg's got to be kilt," announced the court, "but we got to hear its boss, I guess."

"Jedge," started Windy, getting to his feet, "I want to de-gress jus' a minute. You know a pleader's got a right to talk as long as he wants. Now, this is the time o' year when it's awful dry. Sittin' here in this heat I bin thinkin' what glor'ous things the Lord give us—dergs an' fresh, coolin' drinks. Dergs is fer our souls; drinks is fer our bodies.

"We're on'y human bein's, Jedge, roamin' 'bout this here earth fer 'while an' shufflin' off. What's it all 'mount to? Very little.

"With this terr'ble heat we enjoy our refreshin' drinks more'n anywheres in the world, I guess. But dergs is companions. They're with us al'ays. We can't al'ays get big, wonderful beers. Sometimes the weather's cold and the beers ain't worth much, but a derg—well, he'll be there.

"I want to draw out the compar'son a little more, Jedge, ef you'll be with me."

He stopped. There was a clatter as some of the audience climbed over feet and got out. Judge Merrill watched them go with fascinated eyes.

"Well," went on Windy hurriedly, "some people know the value of dergs—and wonderful, coolin' drinks. As we sit here, hot, sweatin', dry, we know, too."

He stopped again as others left. A sheepman waved across the room to his buddy, pointed outside in the general direction of Big Joe's, and rubbed his stomach. His companion followed him out.

"Mr. Carrol," said the court suddenly, "I concur with you, mebbe, that it is warm an' dry. We will take a recess o' fifteen minutes while I look up some law references."

MOST of the audience straggled back to hear Windy continue his speech in defense of his dog. At Joe's, a few remained for better and cooler entertainment. A noticeable drowsiness had invaded the warm room. Heads began to nod despite efforts to glean Carrol's speech.

"Yer, honor, Mr. Jedge Merrill," started the strangely benign Windy, "we're on'y humans after all, and nothin' proves it more'n right now when we're packed in here solid to fight fer life o' a derg."

"You mistake the object o' this gatherin', Mr. Carrol," said the judge. "The audience here, sir, is absolutely neutral. It is you alone what pleads fer this mongrel's hide."

It was evident, however, to the gathering that there was not quite as sharp an accent to his words as before the recess.

"This brown-eyed derg what lays at my feet, Mr. Jedge," Windy went on, "ain't a much 'count derg. He ain't got no special breedin' an' he wouldn't never take no ribbons at no show. He's part shepherd and part airedale to the best o' my knowledge an' belief. What else got in the way I can't vouch fer.

"But here he is, Jedge, just a poor derg what 'parently ain't got on'y one friend in the world. He's layin' here wonderin' what's all 'bout. He ain't seen so many pursons together in all his life before, and mebbe he knows somethin's up.

"But he's got life between that yella carcus o' him, Jedge. Jus' as much life as you and me. Now, I ain't makin' no asperations agin you or me when I say this, but he's got jus' as much right to live an' run 'round an' have a good time as you an me—if he's in'cent, which I says he is.

"You know, Jedge, dergs don't get much fun after all. Fer instance, they never leaned against Big Joe's in their lives. They never had a good drink when they was as dry as I am right now. Which brings me, Jedge, to ast fer 'nother recess. I ain't through at all."

He sat down. Judge Merrill ran hastily through the pages of the one big law book on his desk.

"The pennal code," he muttered, "don't say nothin' agin it. It is —— dry weather we're havin'. But it seems as how to me, Mr. Carrol—well, fifteen minutes, gent'-men."

CARROL allowed the dog to wander about the courtroom when the adjournment was taken. Danny was used to the fresh air of the hills. He took the window in one leap.

Twenty minutes later, court opened again with more than half of its original audience sidetracked on other lines of pleasure-seeking. Judge Merrill smirked from the bench with his head cocked on one side.

"You was shayin' somethin' 'bout derg at your feet."

"Yas, yas," drawled Carrol, getting unsteadily to his feet. "Well, Jedge, yer honor, Jedge Merrill, I'm not much o' a talker, but I want to do the best in me fer this derg somewheres at my feet here.

"When you and me is sometime to be ole men, Jedge Merrill, we mebbe won't have many children runnin' 'bout our knee, 'cause we never married. You and me—we ain't lucky at women, you know—well, we won't talk o' that here. That is gone and fergot. But what we will have when we're ole is a derg, mebbe more'n one, several, a whole litter, mebbe.

"Then, Jedge Merrill, yer honor, when you get to the gran' ole age o' ninety-five, I know the Lord will grant a man o' your sterlin' caliber, you will know what love means after all. But if we turn this day agin a derg, let that Hefty Thompson shoot it to death—then what can we say when we are old an' some derg takes the place o' them children we ain't got?"

Carrol stopped and brought out his bandana and gave a generous wipe to his eyes. Across the room Hefty Thompson was beginning to snore.

"Yer honor, Jedge Merrill," reopened Windy, "I object to lack o' int'rest shown by the persecution in this case. Ef that is all he cares why should we shoot a derg? Le's 'journ agin an' mebbe we can get 'gether an' settle this outa court."

"That'd be good idear," said the court with considerable dignity, "but this's court o' law. This must be settled over bench o' law."

"'S-right. One best courts o' law in land, too," continued Windy. "Best court o' law in land. Absolutely best jedge o' law, too. Wouldn't take 'vantage fer world. But nothin' in law books, Jedge, agin li'l recess?"

"Mebbe. I take look. Fishteen minute, gen'men."

TEN minutes later Judge Merrill and Windy Carrol wandered back. They found the courtroom empty except for Hefty, who sat still with his feet braced against the stove, his hat over his eyes—sound asleep.

The judge bowed stiffly to Carrol as the sheepman aided him to make the two steps to the bench.

"Shanks, shir."

Carrol returned the bow, halted a chair and got into it.

"Well, Jedge," he said, leaning forward confidentially, "thin's ain't what ust be. 'Member in ole days when ust chase atter Katy McClure, who learned kids up at school? Now we're frien's, Jedge, the best in world."

"Absholutely best in world," returned the court. "Old days forgot. Would mind pushin' table down on floor? Shanks, shir. I like you, Mr. Windy. Best o' frien's, best in world, wide, wide world."

"S'good. Fer twenty year bin waitin' fer that," said Windy with a big smile.

The court frowned down toward the old enemy for a short second. Then he too smiled, suddenly wistful.

"Bin waitin' long time fer it, too, Windy."

Carol began to feel strangely guilty.

But the judge had succumbed again.

"Like ever'body," he said huskily. "Don't wan' to go have no en'mies. An' you most o' all, Windy. But they ain't nice to ole' man. Try kid me, Windy. While was out, got called 'phone. Jim Foster what works over yer place 'phoned found dead coyote. All chawed up or somethin'. 'Magin'!"

"'Sdirty shame, Jedge," sympathized Carrol. "Look, too, how that Hefty fella snores right in court. 'Sdirty shame!"

"By way," said the court, "got case 'fore me?"

"Me, Jedge?"

"Yas, somethin' 'bout derg. We wuz shayin' how he kilt three coyote 'fendin' poor, in'cent li'l lamb."

"Ush, jedge?"

"Yus. Don't see how make offishal rec'mendation fer medal or somethin' fer derg. Shorry. Case o' this derg dismissed. Mr. Windy. I scribble so on book."

"What derg, Jedge?"

"Derg bin gassin' 'bout. We bin, ain't we?"

"Don't know, Jedge. Have we?"

"Mebbe have. Where's derg?"

"Ef mean my derg fer some reason, Jedge, he beat it fer home 'bout five drinks back, Jedge. But don't see what derg got to do with ush, Jedge."

"Me sneither," said Judge Merrill. "Le's go have drink an' talk over that li'l shnubnoshed Katy McClure."

WHITE FALCON

A Three Part Story

Part II

by

Harold Lamb

Author of "Mark of Astrakhan," "Bogatyr," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THROUGH the Gora gate at Moscow came three Cossacks: Ayub, a Zaporoghian, Khilt, an old man who had once been leader, *Koshevoi ataman*, of all the Cossacks, and Kirdy, a very young warrior, the grandson of Khilt. They were looking for their brethren, five hundred *Donskoi*, Cossacks of the Don, who, they had heard, were quartered in Moscow with the troops of Boris Godunov, Tsar of the Muscovites.

But they found that their brothers had not taken service with the Muscovite, but had been captured by him in battle and were sentenced to be tortured to death.

Running to the screening within which the *Donskoi* were imprisoned Ayub wept tears over the fate of his brother in arms Demid, the White Falcon, leader of the five hundred.

But Khlit, the old man, fled from his brothers the *Kosaki*, Cossacks, and bribed his way into the presence of Boris the Tsar.

"Urgench is a far city on the Blue Sea in the land of the Turkomans," he said. "If you will set the *Donskoi* free they will bring you the rich treasure of the city. None else could do this thing."

And the Tsar was convinced, and freed the *Donskoi* on their oath that they would bring him the treasure.

Boris Godunov that night asked Shamaki, his old Tartar magician, what the outcome of the venture would be.

"It will end in success," said the old man, "but there will be much bloodshed."

Yet the old man left the court and joined the Cossacks.

Thus the Don men set forth, through wild waterless regions, leaving the Royal escort, a regiment under Van Elfsburg, at the Volga. They pushed on in the face of famine until they reached the Jaick. Kirdy rode ahead as leader of the *Donskoi* scouts.

THEY crossed another river.

It was smaller than the Jaick and its current was sluggish, so that they were able to ford it without difficulty and get the wagons across in one day. Here, too, they filled the water skins and the animals were able to graze.

Every evening the Cossacks gazed to the south for a sign of the inland sea beyond which Urgench lay, and they asked Kirdy if he had seen any glint of blue water. But the land they traversed was the same—the same gray clay and sand and the purple and red pinnacles that lined the way like watch-towers.

Some of them noticed, however, that they were ascending.

The skyline was closer to them and they went up more often than down. A fitful breeze brushed the barren desert

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"White Falcon," copyright, 1925, by Harold Lamb.

floor. More than once they saw herds of antelope and gazed longingly at the slender beasts that seemed to drift away from them rather than run. Some of the best mounted Cossacks tried to ride down the antelope and were jeered at by their companions.

"If game is here," Demid pointed out, "we will soon meet men."

But Makshim and some others shook their heads, saying that no men could live in such a land.

"The Blue Sea is near," retorted Ayub, "and surely we will find fisherfolk on its shores. The *ataman* has spoken truly."

"And if there is no Blue Sea? What then is in store for us? No one has seen this sea."

Ayub had gained experience from his passage-at-arms with Dog-Face, and he had spent some time in questioning Khlit.

"There is a dark spirit in you, Makshim," he observed sagely. "No man from Christian lands has seen the Blue Sea—that is true. But no man of ours has been in this spot before now."

"Not in all the earth is there a sea in the desert."

"May the dogs bite you, Makshim! You have read a book and not one but many. And what is written in books is more lie than truth."

"How?" demanded the *kuren ataman* frowning.

"Because that is how it is. Who writes in books? Priests, schoolmasters and councilors. What do they write? Only what is in their minds. And of what good is the mind of a Latin priest or a schoolmaster?"

"Better than the legends of the minstrels."

"Not so. The *bandura* players sing of what the knightly heroes have accomplished—their tales relate Cossack glory. Every one knows that once *Potiuk*, the falcon ship, sailed across dry land, and Helen the Fair fought with a wizard."

"You are a fool, Ayub. How could a ship sail on land?"

The big Zaporoghian frowned because the tales of the minstrels were well liked by the men of the brotherhood.

"Do you not know that Piotr, the apostle, once walked on the water? If a man can walk on water, a ship can pass over dry earth."

This unusual reasoning silenced Makshim for a moment.

"Yet Piotr, the apostle, did not walk of his own strength on the water. Besides, he was a craven."

Ayub ransacked his memory for words he had heard spoken by the warrior-priests of the Cossacks.

"Not so. For, when the Roman knights came to take the White Christ and deliver Him to the torture, did not Piotr the blessed draw his saber at once? It was so! Truly he delivered a bad cut—only struck an ear off a Roman—but there is much good in a man who will draw his saber in defense of his Faith. And a craven is one who will forsake his brothers in need."

And he looked keenly into the half-shut eyes of handsome Makshim.

"At least," smiled the *kuren ataman*, "you are no better than a hound that doubles on the trail it is following, Ayub, and runs down a cold scent instead of coming up with the quarry. Because what you now say you had from a book."

"Nay, I had it from the lips of the little father, and may a thousand fiends tear me, if *he* had it from a book, because he could read not a jot except the great gold letters that named the saints. Our little father had a fine throat for song and he swallowed more brandy than water. But read he could not. What he said of Piotr and the White Christ is a legend, told him by others, who had it from their fathers. And so it is true and not false and I will stretch out him that says otherwise."

"All your words, Ayub," put in another squadron commander who had been listening attentively, "do not reveal to us a trail that we can follow out of this accursed wilderness."

"Where lies this sea?" demanded a tall Cossack who seldom uttered a word. "As well hunt for a wind in the steppe!"

"Aye," said Makshim boldly, "even the Tatars know that Demid has lost his way. He goes ahead cautiously with the *tabor* and sends out scouts."

"It is true," quoth Goloto who had come up when he saw the squadron commanders in talk sitting their horses beside the wagon trail, "that the way is hard. We have lost a third of the oxen and a hundred horses have made the vultures glad. But, listen to me, noble sirs, it is better to go where the *ataman* leads, quickly and with a good heart as is the Cossack custom."

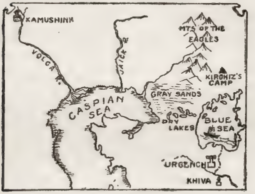
"But we have no more fresh meat, except horseflesh at times."

"My *kuren* has barley only sufficient to keep the horses alive for ten days."

"It is clear," Makshim put in quickly, "that the Cossack brotherhood is not agreed. I ask that a council be called."

Goloto frowned and Ayub swore at this and the others were silent. Since his first speech to them Demid had said nothing of their journey and the hardships had grown upon them until tempers had become frayed.

"If we were marching upon a foe," vouchsafed the saturnine Cossack at last, "I would say to Goloto, 'Sir brother, your words are truth, and the devil himself would not say otherwise.' But here it is different. Who knows whither we are marching, unless the *ataman*, and he will not speak?"



"Aye," nodded Makshim, spitting into the hot sand at which his pony was pawing restlessly. "We are no more than the ghosts of men marching nowhither."

The others looked at Goloto who pondered long, raising his shrewd eyes to the skyline.

"If this were our own steppe or the shores of Tcharnomor or even Roum*—we would need no council. But here we have marched without a blow struck or a pistol fired, and it is evident that this is an abode of devils. So, sir brothers, it is my opinion that we should call a council and ask the *ataman* whether we are going against devils or men."

HEARING this, Ayub wheeled his black stallion and rode away from the group. He was troubled because, unless in sight of the enemy or marching over hostile territory, three of the five *kuren atamans* had the right to call a council. Until now Makshim had been alone in his opinion that they were lost, but with Goloto and the other squadron commander on his side, the council would be summoned that night, and to the troubles of Demid who had all the responsibility of leading men and beasts across the desert would be added the hardship of dispute and dissension.

If Demid should order Makshim shot down, the Cossacks might divide into two factions and fall to blows; if the young *ataman* deprived the three squadron leaders of rank, their men would be angered and a sore would be opened that might never heal.

If on the other hand Demid did not deal with the objectors strongly and at once, the *ataman* might lose the baton because the Donskoi in their present mood would not have a leader who lacked a firm hand.

He found Demid at the rear of the wagon train deep in talk with an old Tatar who possessed a fine eagle—now hooded, and chained to a perch built upon the wagon.

"*Tchelom vam, kunak*," he grinned. "The forehead to you, brother! You will be in a hot kettle tonight, and I would not be in your skin for a dozen such golden eagles as that one."

Demid looked at his comrade inquiringly, and Ayub explained what had been discussed by the squadron leaders.

"That —— Makshim is at the bottom of it. They all went off to talk to Khlit."

"What said the Wolf?"

"He said, 'Who is your *ataman?*' And they answered 'Demid, the Falcon.' "

"And then?"

"Khlit snarled at them. He is old, Demid, and quarrels weary him. But he called me back and asked one thing of me. 'Who is Demid?' I said, 'He is my *kunak!*' He looked at me for a long time and then bade me tell you to put Makshim in Kirdy's place when all was done."

"He said that? Find him and bid him to me. Send a rider after Kirdy at once."

As if Ayub's message had not surprized him, Demid returned to his talk with the Tatar, and when Ayub reported that Khlit was not to be found in the *tabor*, he was silent until Kirdy rode up on a sweating pony and dismounted to come to his leader's stirrup.

"Have you seen antelope, Kirdy? Near at hand? Good! Men say you have hunted with eagles."

"Aye, father."

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* Turkey.

"Here is one trained to stags. I think he will fasten upon antelope, because the Tatar has kept him underfed. Take him and—what is your name, Tatar?"

"Shamaki, O my khan."

"Well, I think you stole the golden eagle, Shamaki, because bringing down stags is not the sport of Muscovite slaves."

"*Yachim*—no, my khan."

"Take the pair of them, Kirdy; direct the *tabor* to where the antelope can be seen and show us sport. Wait! Take Goloto with you."

"At command, father."

Kirdy bade the Tatar follow while he changed to a fresh pony, and Shamaki hastily sought in the wagon for a scarred horsehide gauntlet that covered his arm to the elbow. When he had pulled this on he unchained the eagle and let it grip his wrist. This done, he hurried after the young warrior, panting under the weight of the great bird. Without bidding he flung himself on the back of a pony in the remount herd, and Kirdy smiled when he saw that Shamaki had picked out the second best of the nearest horses. He himself had the piebald pony, the best of the lot.

Goloto was well pleased to accompany them, because he loved hawking almost as much as the Tatar. And envious glances were cast at the three as they galloped off, Kirdy in the lead.

Meanwhile the *tabor* had turned aside from its course and headed toward a ridge that afforded a view of the plain on all sides. Before the nearest Cossacks had settled themselves in their saddles to watch, the three riders were a mile away, drawing closer to the antelope herd that drifted slowly before them.

When Kirdy signed to him, the Tatar pulled the hood from the eagle and it darted up, its great wings threshing like wind-whipped banners. The three horsemen drew rein and watched.

At first the brown bird soared until it seemed to press against the clouds, then it circled over the antelope herd. And as if warned by some sixth sense of the shadow in the sky, the herd made off, sweeping over the brown earth in a wide circle that took it clear around the hunters.

Swiftly as grains of dust pelting before a wind the antelope fled and the eagle swooped down behind the herd twice as swiftly. It alighted on the neck of one of the slender creatures and clung fast.

Maddened by pain—the sharp beak was goring the base of its skull—the antelope swerved and the herd darted away from it. The two Cossacks and the Tatar spurred after it. The antelope stumbled, lurched erect and went off in another direction, blinded by the wings that beat about its head. Kirdy quartered across its course and ran his spear into its flank. The antelope leaped forward and fell prone, while Shamaki dismounted to drag off the screaming eagle.

"That was well done," acknowledged Goloto. "My horse is not as good as yours, *ouchar*. Once, while visiting the Tcherkessians in the Caucasus, I hunted mountain sheep with the eagles. That was worth while."

Kirdy's eyes glistened as they made off after the herd. He brought down another antelope, held by the eagle and Goloto roped a third and was well satisfied thereat. A fourth was killed by the bird before they could come up. By then the herd, which had been circling and darting about as if unable to judge where the danger lay, fled too far to be followed, and the hunters rode in on tired ponies.

"The forehead to you, eagle!" cried the Cossacks who had been watching with keen eyes from the *tabor*. "You have shown us good sport and brought us fresh meat."

Although there was hardly more than a mouthful to a man, they roasted the antelope steaks that evening, kindling fires with difficulty from dried dung and the few tamarisk bushes that grew about the knoll—for other fuel there was none.

WHEN they had eaten dinner they gathered to a man about the highest point in the ridge where Demid had flung his saddle on the ground and was sitting on it. A space about him was kept clear, and in this space stood the five *kuren atamans*. Ayub and Kirdy, who had searched the camp in vain for Khlit—even looking through the wagons on the chance that he had crawled into one and had gone to sleep—were in the foremost rank of the warriors. For once no sentries were posted because all the Cossacks had thronged to the council and because in that barren land only the half moon, peering through a cloud rift, looked out upon them.

When they had been in their places some time Demid rose and took his cap in his hand.

"The brotherhood has asked the *ataman* to a council. I am listening. Who speaks?"

There was an uneasy silence because no one wished to be the first to raise his voice. The Don men were in a black mood, and restless under the monotony of the long march. They were in a mood to tear down leaders and set up new ones; and yet the falcon was well loved. The man who spoke the wrong word might be slain by the hands of his own comrades if anger were aroused.

"Speak, Ivan Aglau!" said Demid at length, passing over Makshim and picking out the leader of one of the lance squadrons—the gloomy Cossack who seldom raised his voice.

The tall warrior stepped out from his companions and folded his arms.

"Greeting to you, *ataman* and to you, noble sirs. It is well known that I can do more with a lance than with my tongue. I only see that we are going into a land where no man lives, and so I say to the *ataman*, the falcon, 'Lead us where we can face men and draw our weapons in a good cause.' That is my speech, brothers."

"Well said, Ivan Aglau!" cried one. "The devil himself couldn't find a Turk here!" echoed another.

"Speak, Goloto!" Demid turned to the squat, pock-marked squadron leader. The veteran warrior hesitated. He was in a cheerful mood after the antelope hunt, and he had a hearty respect for Demid.

"I have only this to say, sir brothers. Does the *ataman* know the road, or is he lost? Because if he knows the road there is nothing more to be said. But if the *tabor* is crawling like a snake without a head, then 'tis time for the wisest among us to deliberate."

"That, too, is true, Goloto!" they cried. "Where is the road?"

In turn Demid called upon the two squadron leaders who had not favored holding the council and they both explained promptly that they were not in the circle of their own will, and had no protest to make.

"Hedgehogs!" shouted a warrior. "You are trying to ride two horses at once."

Members of the two *kurens* in question took up the challenge instantly and hard words passed back and forth until the rising tumult was stilled by Demid's thundering—

"Makshim!"

The *kuren ataman* in the red coat flung up his hand and faced the ring of bearded faces.

"Sir brothers! You are hooded falcons. You are dead men wandering without graves! Once you were Cossacks, lords of the steppe, masters of the rivers. The minstrels sang of your deeds, and your sons looked about proudly. Then the Muscovite emperor came down from his forests, a torch in one hand, steel in the other, and your *ataman* bent the forehead to him, and you became prisoners."

Once more the murmur of many voices threatened to rise into a roar that would set passion loose. Makshim held up both arms.

"In Moscow you were to be put to death, it is true. What have you gained from the bargain made by your *ataman?* Torture! Death here where only the kites will be the gainers."

Certain now of the attention of the warriors, he folded his arms and spoke deliberately—

"Ivan Aglau spoke well when he asked to be led against living foes; brave Goloto said as wisely when he pointed out that you were wandering here without a road. What is my message to you, sir brothers? This: In three days only a remnant of food will be left. If we turn back *now* we can regain the Jaick where we will find water, grazing land and game. In two days or three we can not turn back.

"Go, now, and carry fire and steel against Kamushink—revenge yourselves on the Muscovites. They who die will have an honorable end; they who live will be victors."

A shrewd orator, he ceased with this word, and no answering shouts greeted his oration. The warriors were all staring at Demid, murmuring and shifting restlessly upon their feet; a vague anger was stirring in them, but at what they did not know.

Demid, who had allowed Makshim to speak after the other *kuren atamans* so that he would be able to answer at once, now waited until the muttering ceased. When all were quiet, he put one hand on his sword hilt, the other on his hip. His splendid head, clear cut in the moonlight turned slowly as if seeking certain warriors in the dense mass below him.

"Where are the brothers who went with me on Tcharnomor? Are any here?"

A few voices shouted response, although a hundred or more in the gathering had been with Demid on the Black Sea.

"And where are the brothers who rode to Aleppo and back again with the treasure of a pasha?"

"Here, *ataman*—we are here."

"Are any here who took by surprize the beacon tower of Roum, when the Turks fled without their trousers?"

A savage laugh greeted this, for the capture of the sultan's lighthouse on the Bosphorus had been a notable exploit, and the blind *bandura* players had made a song of it.

"Then let these warriors speak," Demid cried. "Let them say whether at such times I was *ataman* of the Don men, or only headman of the council."

It was Ivan Aglau who took it upon himself to answer, his harsh features dark in the moonlight.

"You were our *ataman*, our father. Speak to us now, because the Cossacks are troubled; there is a devil in them. Speak wise words so that our spirits will be refreshed; otherwise only God knows what will become of us in this place."

THE young leader advanced a pace so that all could see him and his voice was quiet, even drawling—Kirdy had heard Mongol khans address the council in such fashion.

"When the Muscovites marched against the Donskoi the second time and we were scattered in battle I surrendered to their chiefs—I gave you and myself up to them, when we could have fled deeper into the wilderness. But whither? To the Tatars? To the desert? We could not, with the women and children; if we had fled without them the villages would have been sacked by the Muscovites, our daughters dishonored and our sons made slaves.

"When Khlit, the Wolf, talked with Boris Godunov a choice was given us. The hangman would light our way or we could march upon Urgench armed and mounted, to live or die. I chose this. If any of the brotherhood would choose otherwise now, they may take their wagons and ponies and journey back to Moscow and give up their arms, saying—

"Great Prince, we have come back without redeeming our pledge.' "

Although the Cossacks stirred uneasily, no one made answer and suddenly Demid flung back his head, his nostrils twitching.

"Are your spirits uneasy, my children? Nay, my heart burns! It is heavy—heavy. Once the Cossack was master of the Don; now he bows his head. The Muscovites have come forth from their cities; they build forts where the rivers join; they send barks where our boys fished in other days—caravans along the trails where the maidens used to drive out the cattle to pasture.

"Our steers are no longer ours. They must be sold to the Muscovites. We must give them horses. O my children, did we not welcome them to our bread and salt when they first appeared in our lands? We treated them not otherwise than as brothers, and drove the Tatar into the desert, the Turk into the sea at the wish of the Tsar Ivan, who was a warrior.

"Now they say to us, 'The land is not yours but ours' and 'Your *ataman* is not a chief but a colonel of a regiment to serve us.'"

He gripped his head in both hands, and passion, so long held in restraint, set his body quivering. Kirdy had never seen Demid aroused before and he knew that the wrath of this man was terrible.

"How can I, your *ataman*, give comfort to your spirits? In the darkness the eyes of the dead *atamans*, the heroes, glare at me like wolves. Lordly Schah and Skal Osup gaze at me from the star world and shake their gray heads in reproach. In their day the whole world trembled when the Cossacks mounted into the saddle, and even a Sultan did not sleep soundly of nights. In my day the hands of Muscovite merchants reach out to our daughters, and hired soldiers hold weapons at the heads of our sons. Darkness is before us, and how can life itself be endured?"

The warriors were breathing deeply, their heads hanging on their breasts, their hands gripped in girdle and belt.

"You have asked me to show you the road!" Demid's laugh was more like a bark, deep in his throat. "I know no road but one to Urgench. Have ye no eyes? The Tsar seeks to make slaves of the Don people! And this is what I say to you, O my brothers: If the Donskoi yield to a master, you will have a new *ataman*, for Demid will not be among the living. And I say one thing more, Ride on to Urgench, bear off the spoil that is sought by the Muscovites—aye, ye few who will live—and you will be free men.

"That is the Cossack's road. No other can follow it. To live by the sword and die not otherwise, to endure torture, to make new paths into the wilderness. What is the reward? The minstrels will sing our names, the grandfathers in the villages will speak of our deeds, and children yet unborn will gather quietly to listen to the hero-tales. And that, my brothers, is Cossack glory!"

For several moments after he ceased no one spoke, and then the oldest of the warriors who had sailed with him on Tcharnomor and had reined their horses into the mosques of the Turks began to nod their heads and stroke down their mustaches. Others, eyes bent on the ground, felt shame at their own murmuring, and no one opened his lips until Ivan Aglau the silent lifted his head.

"Aye, father you have spoken the word for which we were waiting. By it our spirits are comforted, our hearts no longer burn."

BUT the near-madness of that gathering of weary men, relieved in a measure by the passion of their leader, sought another outlet.

"Makshim is a traitor. Death to him!"

"Tie him to horses! Tear him!"

Only the *kuten* of Makshim refrained from the outburst of anger, and the squadron leader became pale, although he did not move from his place or touch a weapon.

"Dogs! Men without faith! To your places!" Demid's thundered command checked the ring in its rush forward. "What is Makshim's crime? That he spoke boldly? That he advised otherwise than I?"

"Father," growled Goloto, "he called the council, and now we are ashamed, for we wish no other *ataman* than you."

"Because you are ashamed, you would cut down Makshim!" Demid gibed at him, thin lips smiling. "He is a brave man, and what was in his mind he has said freely. Is his fate in your hands or mine?"

"In yours!" Goloto cried, starting.

"I have no blame for him. Nay, tomorrow let him take his *kuren* and go in advance to point out the way to us."

"I thank you, *ataman*," Makshim responded slowly. "I will do what I may. But my mind is still the same. I think we are lost in this desert."

Demid glanced at him, sunken-eyed, as if just awakening from sleep, and was aware of a commotion in the ring of warriors. The nearest men stepped aside and Khlit appeared beside the squadron commanders. He looked tousled and sleepy, but Demid noticed that his sheepskins were wet with sweat.

"What is the matter, noble sirs?" he growled. "I have been dozing, out where the horses are."

Laughter greeted this, while Ayub stared at Khlit in deep perplexity. He and Kirdy had ransacked the *tabor* for the old warrior without result.

"The matter is—we have lost the road," explained Makshim stubbornly.

"Nay, how could that be? I know the way. Before sunset tomorrow you will come to a village and from there you can see the Blue Sea."

Exclamations greeted this and the Cossacks flung their caps into the air. The *kurens* moved off, and before long the wailing of a fiddle was heard. Forgetting their hardships, and heedless once more of what the future would bring, the warriors settled down, some to sing, others to throw dice by the embers of the fire and others to sleep, stretched out as they were in the sand.

On the morrow, with a dozen men Makshim struck ahead of the *tabor*, and by noon came up to a cluster of clay huts. They were deserted, and the reason was apparent. The skeletons of men and women lay within and without. Except for a few water jars and iron pots, the huts contained nothing. Near the skeletons lay arrows, broken for the most part, and some of the skulls had been crushed in.

"These are Turkoman shafts," announced Makshim, who had examined one. "And it seems to me that the riders from Urgench have been here before us. They have not left much."

Even the clothing was gone from the bodies, because what had not been carried off by the raiders had been destroyed by the crawling things that followed after the wolves and the kites. Makshim turned his attention to the trail of a horse that he had followed into the village. The tracks wound in and out among the huts and went off again to the north-west.

"That is a fresh trail," the *kuren ataman* said thoughtfully. "It was not made more than a day ago. The pony was shod like ours."

"Perhaps a Turkoman has spied upon us, father," suggested a young warrior.

"Fool. Would one have lingered a year in this place? Nay, the rider came from the *tabor* and went back to it again." Suddenly he struck his thigh and swore blackly. "By the Horned One! That was Khlit. The old son of a dog did not know what lay ahead after all. He was lost like the rest of us, and he rode a horse into the ground to scout ahead. He came upon this place."

"But he said he had been asleep."

"Very likely. He can sleep in the saddle, and the pony would have headed back to the *tabor*." Makshim threw back his dark head and laughed. "Eh, we ghosts—we living dead—shall not want for a grave. Yonder is the gleam of water on the skyline."

At first Makshim thought of riding back to the *tabor* and telling the warriors that Khlit, like themselves, was guessing at the route over the desert—that he had gone ahead to spy out a landmark and had returned to describe it to them. But his own men looked at him askance, and if Demid had not taken his part he would have been torn to pieces at the council. He resolved to say nothing more against the *ataman* or Khlit. Because they had come out at last on the Blue Sea that Makshim had not thought to see.

"On, to the water!" he cried.

The following day the wagon train halted at the edge of the Blue Sea and the oxen bellowed piteously, smelling the water that was unfit to drink because it was salt. Even the streams that trinkled down over the rock ridges and the gullies were salty, and the earth was no more than white-crystals. Upon this expanse of vivid blue water and white land the sun beat down relentlessly.

And now Demid gave the word to push ahead at the utmost speed. To escape the greatest heat he traveled by night, halting at dawn. Sick oxen were cut out of the *tabor*, and useless ponies were turned loose to wander after the herd, neighing, until they fell and the lines of vultures that hovered behind the Cossacks settled down anew.

Emaciated shadows, they rode over a gray land under the moon's eye, and above the singing of the warriors could be heard the groaning of the maddened oxen.

"It is fitting," laughed Makshim, "that ghosts should ride at night."

CHAPTER VI

The astrologer sits on his carpet in the sun and between his knees is the sign of the zodiac. Looking upon the stars and the sign he says "This will be!" The wise man listens to all things and looks in the faces of the chieftains, saying "Who knows what will be?"

IT WAS Kirdy who discovered the gateway by the spring of fresh water in a limestone formation, after the *tabor* had passed to the south of the Blue Sea. He told Demid of his find, and several Cossacks went with the *ataman* to look at it and discuss what it might be. For once the oxen had drunk their fill and the horses were searching out a little grass.

The Cossacks found two pillars standing in a ravine whose walls were sheer rock. One of the pillars had fallen, and they saw that the pieces were marble and the head of the column was ornamented with two short swords, crossed beneath a wreath of ivy—all carved in the marble.

"Camels have passed and repassed this ravine," Demid pointed out, "and this must be one of the caravan routes that go from the west to the east, to Cathay. Pagans live in this land, since they have built pillars in honor of their gods."

"Those swords are not of much account," Ayub objected. "They are shorter than a Tcherkessian's knife—a scimitar could overreach them easily."

"You are mistaken, Ayub," put in another Cossack, who was mild of speech and had once been a noble in Kief. "Such swords once carved out an empire."

"Then the men of that empire must have been dwarfs." Ayub himself towered close to seven feet and carried a five-foot broadsword.

"They were Greeks, and the *bandura* players of Asia call their chieftain Iskander. The Latin priests say that he was Alexander."

"May the dogs bite you, Ivashko! Don't you know that Greeks could never conquer anything? A Jew or an Armenian may be trusted sometimes, but Greeks will sell even their wives."

"Just the same, Ayub," observed another warrior, "when I was a slave on a Turkish galley I saw columns like these in the temples of the Greeks that the Turks used for bath-houses."

"Two thousand years ago," went on Ivashko, "the Greeks were otherwise. They raided boldly into Asia."

"Then," assented Demid, "their *ataman* Alexander must have been a splendid leader

—if his enemies remembered his name for two thousand years."

"Aye," nodded Ayub admiringly, "that was a notable raid."

They made camp by the pool in the limestone cliffs, the warriors sleeping under the wagons or under their *svitkas* propped up on the lances. And Demid, who had talked with Khlit, announced in the evening that they would leave the wagon train in the camp by Alexander's pillars of victory.

The oxen were at the end of their strength, and here was water and some grass. Lame and sickly ponies were also cut out of the herd, but Goloto with forty warriors was named to guard the *tabor* until the Cossacks returned. Since leaving the Blue Sea they headed nearly due south, and caravans had been seen on the skyline, and the villages were becoming thicker. Urgench could not lie many days' ride to the south, and if they were to escape observation they could not go on with the ox carts. The warriors, well pleased with the change in affairs, selected the best of the horses and loaded fifty others with powder, barley and dried meat.

At sunset they set out, and Demid gave the experienced Goloto some wise advice.

"Draw the wagons in a square, not on the skyline but in a place that can be defended. Throw out pickets and do not go after caravans, because you will break your teeth on them in this place. If you do not see us in a month, take the best horses and strike back to the Jaick."

"At command!" responded Goloto sadly, because he was to be left behind, and the separation from his brothers was not to his liking.

"I have given you forty good men and firelocks. Keep the wagon train safe."

"You will find it in readiness. Go with God!"

"With God!" repeated the Cossacks who had lingered to ride with the *ataman*.

They took leave of one another and looked back more than once at the familiar mass of horned oxen, and the gray wagons arranged in a solid breastwork about the water; then they spurred on, going swiftly now into the darkness before moonrise, for in this last dash into a hostile land speed was all-important.

AT THE end of the plain the sun was setting, and the sands gleamed yellow. Golden, too, was the dried bed of a great river sunk between purple rock ridges. It was like the sloughed skin of a snake, lying dry and brittle and motionless upon the plain. And yellow were the domes and minarets of the city that crouched behind a high wall on the bank of the inanimate river.

Apart from the spear-like pinnacles of the mosques, but within the wall, projected the squat towers of a castle, built in the age when rock-casting machines and naptha throwers were to be feared in a siege. One by one, stars shimmered forth in the purple haze above the towers. No men were to be seen on the walls or on the breast of the plain, but, as the sun touched the horizon, an impalpable veil seemed to rise from the ground and hang about the glowing domes.

Such was Urgench in the year of Bars the Leopard, by the Tatar calendar.

The yellow haze was no more than the last level rays of sunset striking upon the particles of dust that hung in the air, and the distance from the Cossacks to the wall was too great to permit them to see human figures, but the warriors were silent as they gazed on the desolation of the plain and the gleaming city behind the veil in the air.

They—the advance under Makshim and the leaders—were resting in the mouth of a ravine to the northwest of Urgench. On their left hand, an hour's ride, the river bed wound toward the city; on their right the golden sands stretched into the eye of the sinking sun. Most of them were in shirt-sleeves or stripped to the waist, and their bodies shone red in the after-glow, so that even their eyes, tortured by the heat and the glare of the desert floor, were as scarlet as blood. So, too, was the head of the white falcon on the standard in Ayub's scarred fist.

Some of the warriors touched the small crosses to the hilts of their sabers, because Urgench, seen in the sunset, appeared to be one of the substanceless cities that had taken form more than once when they were coming down over the salt plains, and which they fancied were the creation of Moslem magicians to lead travelers or enemies astray.

Others fell to questioning Kirdy, who had been stationed by the standard, and Ayub, after he had yielded the command of the advance to Makshim.

"That is Urgench," he said stoutly. "I know the castle towers well. It is strong—the castle of the Khan."

"But we see no men," put in another *oùchar*. "Here are no sheep herders driving their flocks toward that gate—no horses grazing."

Ayub, who had been struck by the same thing, mocked at the youthful warrior instantly, saying that at sun-down the Moslems always gathered within walls to wash their hands and bow down to their prophet.

"That is true," assented Kirdy, "yet there is another reason. Here the desert reaches to the city wall; on the other three sides there are caravan roads and fruit trees, villages and herds."

Demid, who had been listening, turned his head and spoke quietly.

"How high is the outer wall, *oùchar?*"

"Two lance lengths, father."

"And this gate, is it closed at night? Guarded?"

"The Bab el Mirza, the Gate of the Prince, is not closed at night because it faces the desert from which no enemies have come before now. But it is guarded because the Khan is always at war with his brothers or the Tatars of the north or the Persians of the south."

"How strong is the guard?"

"Perhaps one ten, perhaps two. If Arap Muhammad Khan should be in Urgench with his riders there might be no more than one watcher, father."

The day before their scouts had brought in a few Moslem merchants, and these had sworn that the khan and his men were down the river. If the Turkoman horde had returned to the city, Demid knew that his Cossacks might enter Urgench but they would never leave it alive. It was impossible for him to send spies into the city, or to scout near the walls. Before they could reach the vicinity the full moon would be up and they would be seen. They must make the attack blindly and trust to their luck for the rest.

But Demid saw to it that they made use of every advantage and he pondered a trick to play on the Turkomans. A daring swordsman, utterly reckless in battle, he was cautious in planning action and Kirdy knew that this forethought of their leader had brought them safely beyond the Blue Sea. He watched Demid eagerly, drinking in every slow-spoken word.

First the *ataman* asked the opinion of the squadron leaders. And both Ivan Aglau and Makshim agreed that they would be seen when they were a half mile distant from the gate.

"Nay," Demid said, "we can move down the river bed to within musket-shot unseen."

The Cossacks nodded ready assent, except for one who pointed out that the river bank was three musket-shots from the gate, which could be closed before they reached it. Once the gates of Urgench were shut, their chance was lost, because they had no cannon to batter the wall, nor could they hope to starve out the inhabitants because Arap Muhammad Khan would be up in a week.

"Well said," agreed Demid. "What does the Wolf say—he who has clawed open many a wall before now?"

"*Ataman*," grumbled Khlit, "the dogs will see us in any case. Send men openly, therefore, but only a few—enough to hold the gate until the squadrons come up from the river."

"Good!" cried Demid. "If the Turkomans had wind of us, their riders would have been out on the plain. Now listen, my brothers, to the plan. Ivan Aglau will take his own squadron of lancers and the men of Goloto's squadron into the river-bed. Ride swiftly—the footing will be troublesome—and assemble under the bank nearest the wall by the first hour of the morning. The shadows will be deep at that time. When you hear a wolf howl thrice, rush your horses up and take possession of the gate."

"Aye," grunted Ivan Aglau, well pleased with his task.

"Khlit, you can speak with the dogs of Turkomans. Take five pack horses, well loaded, and a ten of warriors. When you are a mile from the gate, dismount and walk forward with the pack animals. Hide your weapons until you are within reach of the Moslems, then give the signal and hold the gate open until Ivan Aglau comes up."

The old Cossack nodded understanding, and asked only that Kirdy be allowed to go with him to see how such things were done.

"Aye," grinned Ayub, who was ruffled because he had not been consulted.

"I will take my *sablianka*—my little sword—and go before you." He patted the long hilt of his five foot blade, and handed the standard to another Cossack. "Then all you will need to do is to howl like the wolf you are."

In a moment the two squadrons of lancers were moving past them and trotting out of the ravine, when Kirdy turned his pony to go back for the pack animals. As he did so he looked swiftly sidewise and his hand went to his saber hilt. Out of the near-darkness in the ravine two eyes glared at him—two eyes that were almost luminous.

Bending forward, he peered at two shadows that stood against the black wall of rock, and made out that the eyes belonged to the golden eagle and that Shamaki was squatting among the boulders. The Tatar slave had volunteered to come with the Cossacks although his fellows had stayed at the wagon train. Khlit had taken a fancy to the eagle, and Shamaki may have hoped for another chance to let it out after antelope.

So intent was he on the business in hand, Kirdy did not reflect until an hour afterward that Shamaki had no right to be at the head of the column where the leaders were talking.

* * *

THE forms of the men in front of him were black and silver. A bell clanked on the neck of the leading pack horse, and Kirdy paced in time to it. At Khlit's suggestion the Cossacks of the advance party had loosened their girdles, letting the long sheepskin coats hang over the weapons on their hips. At the head of them Ayub's bulk was unmistakable—the Zaporoghian strode on as if a thousand spears and not a dozen shambling tatterdemalions were at his back. His long sword remained where he always carried it, strapped to his shoulder so that only the hilt was visible from the front.

For once Ayub walked in silence and the others had hard work to keep up with him. Kirdy was quivering with excitement, and his ears were strained to catch the neigh of a horse from the river-bed close at hand, or a shout from the group of men who watched their approach in the open gate. But the warrior beside him hummed carelessly—

"Left—right!
We know you, Muscovite!"

Until Khlit growled a warning, and the song ceased. Ayub swore under his breath and Kirdy who had been peering at the black shapes outlined against the white wall, saw that the Turkomans had prepared a welcome for travelers. A score of human heads looked down at the Cossacks from empty eye sockets. The heads had dark curling hair and beards and were set up on spear points on either side the gate.

Kirdy counted the men who lounged among the spears—men who wore turbans bound around conical helmets and striped *khalats*. Seven — twelve — twenty in all. Since they were Turkomans, masters of the desert, they would be armed.

A clear voice greeted the wayfarers harshly.

"Dogs of Armenians—what have you on the horses?"

"*Koumbouzi*—a gift for thee!" responded Khlit at once.

"Art weary of carrying thy nose, graybeard?" gibed another of the guards. "Then you are well come to the *Bab el Mirza!* Look!"

He pointed up at the dark heads on the spears, and Kirdy saw that these trophies of a Turkoman raid had had the noses and ears cut off.

"Thou wilt rest with thy brothers, O Armenian!"

A roar from Ayub answered him.

"It is you, dog-faiths, who will rest on spears and not us."

The Moslems who had been lounging in the sand sprang up, grasping at their weapons. In all their raids upon the Armenian villages no man had spoken to them in this fashion, and now they heard, from the clump of dark figures running toward them, a wolf's howl repeated thrice. Suspicion stirred in them and flamed high when they saw the newcomers pull sabers from beneath long coats.

They were surprized that these dozen should run at them, but—experienced warriors—they wasted no breath in shouting, and closed in on the Cossacks with a rush. Steel blades clanged and the Cossack beside Kirdy went down, groaning, his skull laid open by a blow from a razor-edged scimitar. The bearded Turkoman who had slain him sprang into the air, his blade whistling down at Kirdy.

The boy no longer quivered; the breath came evenly between his teeth and his whole body tingled with exhilaration. Instead of planting his feet and striking with all his strength like the other Cossacks, he met the leap of the Turkoman by throwing himself swiftly to the right. Before the descending arc of steel could follow him, his own sword flicked up—a snap of the wrist that passed the curved edge of his scimitar through the man's side under the ribs.

The Turkoman plunged full length into the sand, and Kirdy snatched up the sword that fell from his nerveless hand. Warding a cut from another Moslem with his new weapon, he plunged the point of his curved saber beneath the man's breastbone and twisted it back and down. The bearded warrior screamed once into his face and was dead before he fell to the earth.

Kirdy had learned swordsmanship in the skirmishes of the tribes, where death hovers close and no cry for quarter is heard. He made no feints, wasted no single motion, and to his mastery of the edged scimitar he had added thrusts with the point, taught him by Khlit. In the sword dance of the Afghans he had learned to wield two blades at once, and when on foot he liked to pick up another weapon if possible.

Now, gliding up to a second foeman, his weapons shone above his head—one silver in the moonlight, the other darkly gleaming. And these curved blades seemed no more than to flicker in the air before the Turkoman sank to his knees.

Ayub went about matters differently. Grasping his heavy straight sword in both hands he swung it in circles as another man might wield a broom-stick. When he cut at a man, leather shields crumpled and bones snapped asunder. About these two swordsmen the hard pressed Cossacks rallied with their war cry—

"Ou-ha-aa!"

But other Moslems were running up to the gate, pushing shut the two heavy doors in spite of the fact that their companions fought outside. Khlit, glancing over his shoulder, lifted his deep voice in a shout:

"Aside, brothers! Aside!"

THE Cossacks heard the pelting of hoofs behind them and sprang out of the way, while the Turkomans hesitated, and ran back toward the gate. The foremost riders of Ivan Aglau's squadron struck them as they were trying to push through the closing barriers. More ponies hurtled up, to thrust flank and shoulder against the gates and under the weight of the horses the portals swung back. Fleeing before gleaming lance tips, the Moslems darted into the nearest alleys and more Cossacks trotted through the *Bab el Mirza*, the last comers drawing rein to guard the gate and mock Ayub.

"*Baba*—old woman! Your tongue wags at both ends, it does. We heard you bellow like a buffalo, and it's ——'s mercy if Arap Muhammad Khan did not hear you, off there in Khiva."

"If the *ataman* doesn't pickle you, tongue and all, we'll make a mute of you."

But the big Zaporoghian, who had been slashed across the arm was good-humored again, and the newcomers stopped to gaze at the rows of heads that lined the gateway, until Demid came up with the standard and the three squadrons at a hard trot. He had brought with him the horses turned loose by Khlit's party, and Kirdy climbed into the saddle of the piebald pony.

Sparing no more than a glance at the heads of the Armenians, he gave orders swiftly.

"Ivashko, fall out with fifty firelocks. Close and keep this gate. Let no one out. You"—he pointed out an *esaul*—"and you do likewise at the other gates. Makshim, take your squadron to the market place with the pack animals and hold it in reserve. Take the standard with you. One squadron with me to the castle—the rest clear the streets."

In bunches of twenty the lancers galloped off into the darkness, shouting and spurring their horses at the shadows that fled before them and Demid swore under his breath.

"They bay like dogs. The castle will be closed against us. *Sably vàn*—draw sabres! Trot!"

AND in fact they found the one gate of the castle shut and barred. The squadron dismounted, ladders were brought and the Cossacks opened fire with matchlocks while the ladders were set in the dry ditch and warriors started to climb, holding the sabers over their heads to protect them against cuts.

They could not defend themselves against arrows that flicked down from the crenellated battlement and the tall forms of the Cossacks were seen dropping into the ditch. In the moonlight few of the bullets from the matchlocks struck the defenders of the wall, who were protected by helmets and mail.

"Cut—slash!" the warriors roared, crowding around the foot of the ladders, striving for a chance to get on the rungs. Ivan Aglau, the silent, led one band to a new spot and raised up a broad ladder, being the first to run up it.

No arrows struck him, but the men clustered below saw a glow appear on the battlement and an instant later an iron pot was tossed over, on to the heads of the Cossacks. From this pot poured forth, smoking and gleaming, molten metal that overwhelmed the assailants as dry leaves are brushed before a torrent.

Others ran back to the ladder, while two *ouchars* dragged forth the dying Ivan Aglau. The flaming iron had dropped through his cap, scarifying his skull and breast and his eyes rolled in agony; but this man who had lived with firmly closed lips, gave forth no moan when life was leaving him.

"*Stoy!*" Demid's clear voice soared through the tumult. "Halt!"

The warriors, drawing back reluctantly with their dead and wounded, found the Cossacks crowded into the cleared space that extended from the castle to the bazaar, clustered around Demid who was talking swiftly with Shamaki. The old Tatar had come with the warriors into the city and had dogged Demid persistently.

"O, my Khan," he said eagerly, "there is another way into the *kurgan*. In former days I was a captive in this place."

"What way?" demanded the *ataman*.

"Under the earth. It leads from a garden to the cellars where honey and grain are stored against a siege."

"A passage? Have you been through it?"

"Aye, my Khan, in other years. Perhaps it is no longer used, but the Turkoman khans are foxes with more than one hole to their burrow."

"Father," spoke up one of the Cossacks, "this Tatar is also a fox. Let us go upon the ladders again."

But Demid shook his head, considering the lined face of Shamaki in the moonlight. He ordered half the warriors to stay before the gate and to burn powder in their matchlocks until he returned. Then, followed by a strong band, he strode beside the squat Tatar through deserted alleys, down into covered runways that smelled of hides and unwashed cloth, through an unguarded gate into a grove of plane trees.

THERE the moon was obscured, and they could see nothing of their surroundings. The garden was deserted and Shamaki pushed ahead without hesitation until the branches thinned overhead and they paused at the gleaming surface of a pool, where the white pillars of a *kiosk* reared among the trees.

"*Shali-mar el khanum*," grunted the Tatar. "The woman's garden. Come!"

He entered the *kiosk* and disappeared from view, first his body then his head with its lynx-skin cap. Demid, following close on his heels with drawn sword, found that steps led down in one corner of the pleasure house. This stairway turned upon itself until the warriors stood in a dark space, cool and damp from the water of the pool.

"A light!" the *ataman* ordered, and two Cossacks who had provided themselves with bundles of dry rushes fell to striking steel against flint until the sparks caught in strands of twisted hemp. Then the reeds were kindled, and Demid saw that they stood in a stone chamber from which a single passageway opened.

Into this the Cossacks filed, those in the rear grasping the belts of the men in front of them, their silver heels clattering on the stones. The passage led down, then up and as nearly as Demid could judge in the direction of the castle, until further progress was barred by an iron gate.

It was a heavy affair, built by artisans of an older day, because the scrolls were worked into the forms of serpents, twining together and the uprights were spears, and all was deep with rust. After studying it a moment, he called back for Ayub and three others.

Four giants swaggered out of the line and ran forward, and Ayub ranged his companions two abreast, himself in the front, a few paces from the gate. With a shout the four hurled themselves at the barrier—a thousand pounds of bone and muscle meeting iron. The bars bent and the lock snapped and something else cracked.

Ayub's lips twisted savagely, and his left arm swayed limp from the shoulder. The bone in the forearm had been broken.

"Well, you have still your sword hand," muttered his companions as they pressed forward.

The iron gate proved to be the only barrier, for they filed out into an arched chamber filled with heaps of grain and with casks of honey. Shamaki croaked triumphantly, hearing the distant thudding of muskets, and Demid led them up into a tiled hall where flickering candles sent their shadows dancing up and down the alabaster walls. Here he waited until the last man had come up, while Kirdy and some of the *oùchars* took possession of the entrances.

In one of the corridors an armed Turkoman appeared, thrusting arrows into the quiver at his girdle. When he saw the detachment of Cossacks his jaw dropped and he flung up lean arms.

"*Ma'shallah!*"

He fled and when one of the young warriors leveled a pistol at him, Demid struck up the weapon and sprang after the Turkoman as a wolfhound leaps at a stag. They darted up a flight of marble steps to a broad gallery where some forty Moslems were clustered around a closed door.

From out the Turkomans advanced a tall warrior with a silver boss on his shield and a heron's plume in his helmet. He spoke only one swift word to his men, and his eyes changed not at all as he dressed his round shield, crying at the Cossacks—

"Arap Muhammad Khan will take many a head from thee for mine. Is there a dog among ye who will stand against me?"

Then Kirdy saw Demid wield a sword for the first time. When the Don men crowded forward eagerly at the challenge of the Turkoman chief, the *ataman* thrust them back.

"Aside!"

His brows drew down and his gray eyes gleamed. He leaped forward, and his saber whistled down at the Turkoman's shield. In mid-air it checked and swept sidewise and in—and the Moslem's parry saved his life. In the same instant Demid's blade engaged the other and the hilts locked. The two weapons that had been sweeping circles of silver, now rose quivering above the heads of the warriors—the Turkoman striving to free his blade, and Demid lifted it higher.

The men of either party stood back, their eyes glued on the interlocked swords. Suddenly Demid laughed and sprang back, having measured the strength of his foe. In a fury, the Turkoman chief slashed at his head, but the scimitar dropped from his fingers. Demid's saber had bitten through the side of his throat and grated on the chest bones.

The knees of the Moslem bent and his body curled downward slowly, as if making an unwilling salaam, when Demid's saber lashed out and the chief's head, severed from the spine, struck the tiles of the floor before his body.

Then the young *ataman* hurled himself at the throng of Turkoman warriors and the Cossacks were not slow to follow. Kirdy heard the Moslems chanting—a panting ululation. No one cried out for quarter—they sold their lives dearly, snarling until the last warrior went down with a saber through his throat.

No sooner had the clanging of the steel blades ceased than boots were heard thudding in the lower hall. Some of Demid's warriors had cut their way to the gate in the courtyard wall, and opened it, admitting the arquebusiers who were waiting outside.

THE *mirza* in command of the castle lay headless beneath their feet, already shrill cries of despair were going up from the inner corridors and the Moslems on the outer wall, taken in front and rear, sprang from the battlements or were cut down in groups.

Silence fell upon the castle, and when Demid and Kirdy made their way to one of the towers, their heels echoed through deserted halls and up empty stairs. For a while Demid gazed out into the haze of moonlight, listening to what went on in the town beneath them.

Kirdy, too, strained his ears, trying to judge from the confused sounds what was taking place. The Cossack patrols were no longer trotting; they walked their horses, and some of the warriors were singing. Pistols flashed at intervals, and ponies rushed fleeing Moslems to earth in an alley or doorway. In the market square torches blazed where Makshim and his hundred stood at ease.

From time to time could be heard the shouted challenge of the guards holding the gates in the city wall, and the mocking answer of Cossack patrols. If any Turkomans still bore arms in Urgench, they were within doors, and the city was in the hands of the Cossacks.

CHAPTER VII

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

DEMID, leaning his bare arms on the battlement, let the light wind cool the sweat on his forehead, while the boy, rejoicing in the nearness of his leader, did not venture to disturb his thoughts with a word. A spear tip had ripped through the flesh on the side of Kirdy's chest and blood dropped steadily on the stones.

The fever of the fighting was still in Kirdy's veins; he wanted to laugh, to seek his horse and ride through the streets with his hand on his hip, to meet his companion *otchars* and listen to their boasts, to go and hunt for horses—he knew the breed of Turkoman stallions that were fleeter of foot than the Cossack ponies.

He was very thirsty and above all he wanted to empty many cups of wine, to take the fever out of his veins. Finally he dared to speak, in the Tatar that Demid understood.

"There is light in the east, O my khan, but the caller-to-prayer will not cry from these towers."

"In the east there is light," repeated the *ataman* slowly. "But what light to guide us, O youth?"

Kirdy was surprized that Demid should be moody when the long march across the desert had ended and they were masters of a rich city.

"Once," went on the *ataman*, "a jackal, being weary and belly-drawn with hunger, entered the den of a tiger. His hunger he satisfied on the bones of a sheep slain by the tiger, and his weariness by sleep. Was he master of the tiger's lair?"

"Nay," responded the boy.

When Demid said nothing more, he pondered the words of his leader and understood that the *ataman* could have little joy in the taking of Urgench. He had won success; his responsibility was the greater. He was pondering the future, just as he was peering into the silvery haze, to learn what his men must face. And Kirdy, thinking of these things, felt that he would never live to be a leader like Khlit or Demid.

"Father," he said shyly, "it is in my mind that a spy has followed us from Moscow."

Demid turned so that he could look into the boy's eyes, but asked no question.

"It is Shamaki, the Tatar," went on Kirdy. "He says that he was once a slave of the Turkoman khans, yet he is a Moslem and they do not hold their fellows as slaves. He says he is a slave of the Muscovite khan, but he handles an eagle like a chief. And when you were giving orders to attack the gate he crept close to hear what was said."

"Did Khlit call Shamaki a spy?"

"Nay, father. That is no more than my thought."

"Then do not speak it. It was Khlit who brought Shamaki from the *tabor* to Urgench."

Bending his head in assent, the boy wondered why Khlit had spoken so often with the Tatar, and why, if Shamaki were the Wolf's friend, Demid trusted the Tatar—for no other reason than that.

The gray eyes of the *ataman* seemed to read his thoughts.

"Many times," observed he, "you will make friends who will stand at your side when weapons are drawn; and some who will dismount and put you upon their saddles if you are wounded in battle. But there are few who can read men's souls. When they speak, men listen with bowed heads. Khlit is such a one."

"How?"

A smile touched Demid's wide, thin lips.

"How? That is hard to say, little brother. Perhaps, looking into a warrior's eyes, he can see treachery or faith. He praises no one—his words are hard; yet it is well known that he has never broken faith, nor turned aside from peril. I have seen men go to sit by him when he slept."

Kirdy lifted his head with an answering smile, because the *ataman* had called him little brother and not fledgling. He was proud that Demid should speak to him as to an older warrior, and if at that moment the chieftain had asked Kirdy to leap from the tower to the stones of the courtyard a hundred feet below he would have done so.

"Put cobwebs on that cut in your side," Demid added, "and put powder in a cup of spirits—quaff it off and the wound will not trouble you. Come, the brothers are knocking at that door."

They found a score of Cossacks led by Ivashko and Dog-Face, at work with sledge hammers and iron bars on the heavy door before which the Moslem *mirza* had been cut down. The warriors had ransacked all the castle and had piled heaps of shimmering silk and fine ivory and some gold plate in the gallery; but they had not been able to find any other entrance into the chambers behind the portal.

When Demid came up the work went on briskly and the massive teak soon splintered. They picked it apart and strode inside. A light gate of carved sandalwood that stood midway down the hall was smashed in by the sledges and some one cried out—

"The women's quarters!"

GUIDED by flaring torches—for the corridors were still dark—they entered a wide room opening, through arched window niches upon a balcony facing the east. Here a fountain cooled the air with its spray, and great cushions rested upon the rugs by the walls.

In one corner knelt a group of shivering eunuchs in high, black velvet hats and long robes. Paying no attention to these, the Cossacks stared at the mistress of the harem.

She was veiled—an almost transparent white cloth hung from pearl clasps over her ears—but brown eyes were eloquent of anger. A band of green emeralds, cut square, sparkled on her forehead. A breath of air, coming through the arches, stirred the black silk cloak she had drawn close to her shoulders, and Kirdy was aware of an elusive scent, resembling crushed rose leaves.

Her black hair, escaping from the cincture of emeralds, fell down her back in long waves. Although she was straight as a willow on tiny slippered feet, the curve of arm and cheek was a thing to marvel at. Quite evidently she was unafraid and angry.

"*Alacha*—slayers—dogs—offspring of the devil! Nay, thou art ghosts—living dead men. When Arap Muhammad Khan learns that his threshold has been crossed, ye will beg to die."

The swift words in Turkish were understood by Demid.

"And thou, O *khanum*—what is thy name?"

"Nur-ed-din, O captain of thieves."

Stepping forward, he pulled the veil from its clasps, and Kirdy, who had never seen a Moslem woman unveiled, was astonished at the transparent skin, the tiny, crimson mouth and the wide, *kohl* darkened eyes.

"Art thou slave or wife, Nur-ed-din?"

"Slave, as thou wilt be!"

"Nay," the young *ataman* laughed. "Does he cherish thee so little that he leaves thee to beguile the castle guards?"

The eyes of Nur-ed-din sparkled dangerously and for once she did not answer.

"Or art thou the treasure of Urgench, so greatly to be cherished that Arap Muhammad Khan cages thee in his castle when he rides afield with his horde?"

This time he was answered. The eyes of the Moslem slave closed and opened again and the glare was gone from their tawny depths. Softly they gleamed, and words dripped like honey from her supple lips.

"*Ai-a!* Wisdom is thine, O Commander of Swords, O Lion of the Desert." She swayed nearer and laid a tiny hand on his forearm. "Am I not *Nur-ed-din*, Light of the World? Send thy men from the room, O *mirza*. It is the law of Islam that a woman's face shall not be seen by other eyes than her master's."

The Cossacks who understood the slave looked expectantly at their leader, to learn whether Demid wanted them to go away so that he could play with this beautiful Persian, or whether he would end the matter by striking her down with the sword.

"Then," Demid said thoughtfully, "Arap Muhammad Khan hath taken hence the treasure of Urgench—the emeralds?"

"Save for these!" She stripped the bracelets from her arms and the circlet from her forehead and laid them on the carpet at his feet. With a sharp cry she clapped her hands and women attendants came out of corners and niches, to disappear into an inner room and return with inlaid sandal-wood boxes. Submissively Nur-ed-din placed these before Demid, opening each one to reveal its contents of jade bangles, ropes of pearls and ornaments of coral and silver.

Demid signed for Ivashko to take them up, and Nur-ed-din straightened, standing before him as obediently as a girl who has had her whipping.

"These were thine, Light of the World," observed the *ataman*. "Is there no more?"

"Nay, by Allah and the Ninety-and-Nine holy names! By my mother's grave, there is no more."

Dog-Face and some of the other Cossacks muttered at this, for they had heard the tale of the treasure guarded in the castle of Urgench.

"*B'ilmaïda*," cried Demid, his gray eyes bleak. "Brothers, seize the eunuchs. Burn the soles of their feet in braziers. Before their feet are black they will tell where Arap Muhammad Khan keeps his plunder."

The creatures in the long robes who huddled in the corner threw themselves on the tiles, wailing. But not one of them begged for mercy.

DEMID, however, had been watching Nur-ed-din, and had seen her lips twist in helpless rage for a fleeting second.

"Stop!" he commanded the Cossacks who were advancing gleefully on the attendants.

"Those yonder would lie to you. But the face of this slave woman does not lie. There is more to be found, and to my thinking within these rooms."

Nor did he look again at the woman who watched silently while the warriors went about their work of destruction, guided now by the first flame of day in the east. With hammer, ax and iron bar they smashed the tiles on the floors, the fretted stonework of the walls, and—going through the corridors—even the columns that held up the roof.

It was Ivashko who sank the head of a bar through the dried clay of the wall above Nur-ed-din's couch, and his shout brought up warriors with hammers who laid bare a compartment in the wall. They pulled out ivory caskets and blocks of carved jade, milky-green in color or white with red veins—jade that held the eyes like crystal, and was soft as wax to the touch of fingers—jade that would have fetched a prince's ransom for each piece in the markets of Cathay.

Among the precious stones that the caskets yielded up were matched emeralds of a size that made the Cossacks stare and shake their heads. Two of them were as large as a man's thumb, doubled.

"Nay, who ever saw the like!" muttered Dog-Face. "Here are the eyes of Arap Muhammad. Only look at the wench!"

And they who turned at his word saw that the eyes of Nur-ed-din glowed with a tawny light that was not gold or green but like the gleam of a panther's eyes when danger is at hand.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PIGEON

LIGHT OF THE WORLD did not fasten the veil again above her ears although it was broad day. Moving quietly amid the wreckage of her chambers, she seemed to be stunned by misfortune and heedless of what befell.

No *muezzin* dared to cry the summons-to-prayer. From the arches of the gallery she looked down on bodies lying in courtyard and alley—huddles of striped cloth, heaps from which bare legs and disordered turbans emerged. Hundreds of Turkomans had been slain in the streets during the night and the Cossacks had tossed their weapons into piles.

But no ululation of lament was to be heard. The doors of house walls were closed, and within them ten thousand Moslems, men, women and children, awaited with the savage resignation of their race whatever fate would hold in store. Resistance had ceased, because the Turk, once defeated, is abject until the tables are turned. The fronts of the rug-sellers' and the goldsmiths' stalls were open and the long coats and the red topped *kalpaks* of the Christian warriors were to be seen passing into the shops and coming out laden with plunder.

No more than a hundred Cossacks kept the saddle, but this hundred, riding through the streets, mocked at the concealed ten thousand, calling on them in vain to come forth with weapons.

Light of the World was not a Turk but a Persian—mistress of wiles and beguilement, child of passion—one of the favorite slaves of mighty Arap Muhammad Khan, who trusted her so fully that he left her to watch over the treasure, the fruits of years of plundering, the earnings of his sword. Arap Muhammad Khan had taken all his six sons to Khiva, and his *mirzas* and *begs* to watch over them—to be very sure that they did not set about raising hordes of their own and slaying him.

To have taken his treasure with him to the lower river would have been to tempt his chiefs and his sons too greatly. And then, too, if he had been called upon to mount the saddle of war and strike into the desert to punish or to pillage the roving Tatar khans or the cities of the Persians, he would have had no place to leave his treasure.

And the riches hidden in the ivory caskets were as his sword-arm to Arap Muhammad Khan, Lion of Islam, the Glory and Protection of the Faithful, the Jewel in the Shield of Allah, and many other things.

The fortress of Urgench had never been taken by the foes of the Turkoman khans. Moreover, the khan had left Nur-ed-din to guard his hoard and he trusted her; the *mirza* in command he trusted less—he of the heron feather—but Arap Muhammad Khan held the only son of the *mirza* hostage in his own tent.

All these matters passed through the agile mind of Nur-ed-din as she moved about the fountain room, like a woman bereft of all thought, taking up a wooden henna pencil, and making marks on a bit of rice paper no larger than her tinted thumb-nail.

She made red scrolls and curlicues that looked aimless but were Turkish words. Tossing away the pointed stick, she crumpled the scrap of paper in her small fist and groaned.

Dog-Face and Kirdy and a Cossack who had been nicknamed "Witless" had lingered to look out on the streets. Feeling thirsty, Dog-Face thrust his head into the fountain and drank. His eye lighting on a discarded hammer, he smashed the delicate marble figure of the fountain, and when Nur-ed-din groaned, he stared at her, at first savagely, then admiringly. Demid and the leaders had gone off with the treasure, and Dog-Face was minded to amuse himself. Witless was casting his lariat at the heads of the eunuchs, chuckling when their enormous, high hats fell off.

"CAN you speak with this tiger-eyed lass, Kirdy?" he asked. "Good! Then bid her wait on me, *oùchar*. Bid her to bring wine at once."

Nur-ed-din spoke to a woman, and the wine was brought in generous jugs. Dog-Face sniffed at it tentatively.

"Well, the little father said we were not to guzzle while we were on the march. —— take me, we've been on the *dorogou*, on the road for two months."

He poured a little expertly into the palm of a calloused hand and tried it.

"May the dogs bite me if it isn't wine of Shiraz. It's against the law of these accursed Moslems to drink such—the book of their prophet forbids them to take a drop of it. And the sons of jackals pour out a drop from a jug and pour the rest down their gullets saying, by ——, they are not drinking a drop but a jug."

Witless came over, drawing his cup out of his girdle bag and wiping his mustaches. They drank each other's health, and other toasts until the jar was empty to the dregs. Then, when Dog-Face called for more, Nur-ed-din spoke swiftly:

"So she will pay us to turn her loose!" muttered the short Cossack, when Kirdy translated. "Well, let's see what she has hidden away first."

Although she was venturing from the women's quarters, Light of the World did not put on her veil. She led the three Cossacks down to a small court shaded by pomegranate trees and lined with wicker cages and dove-cotes.

At her approach the pigeons fluttered up and circled around her head, and Kirdy saw that they knew her. Going to one of the wicker cages, she opened the narrow door and thrust in her arm while Dog-Face and his mate came closer to stare curiously.

Suddenly drawing out her hand she tossed a splendid blue pigeon into the air. It darted above the trees, circled once, and shot away to the south.

And as Kirdy watched it, he cried out. "That is a messenger pigeon, sir brothers!"

"A dove is not a hawk," growled Dog-Face. "What message can it give?"

At the court of the Moghul, Kirdy had seen strong-winged pigeons bred in one place and then carried many days' ride in such wicker cages, and he knew that tiny bits of paper were put into silver tubes on the claws of the birds, so that when they flew back to their home, the written message went with them.

The blue pigeon had darted away toward Khiva, and he remembered now that Nur-ed-din had written on paper with a henna pencil.

When he explained this to Dog-Face, the Cossack scratched his head. "What harm, *oùchar?* Arap Muhammad Khan will know in any case that his nest has been shaken down."

"Nay, the harm is this. Khiva lies three days' ride to the south. We have guarded the gates and the wall. Some Turkomans have escaped on foot, no doubt. But three or four days must pass before they could reach the Khan. This bird will come to earth at Khiva before the sun goes down this day."

THE veteran Cossack was silent a moment; then he groaned and beat clenched fists against his head.

"Allah! Then we have but four days and not seven before the Turkomans ride up."

Kirdy grasped the woman's wrist, and the beat of her pulse was steady under his fingers.

"Did the pigeon carry thy message, O light-of-tongue?"

Her shrill laugh taunted him.

"Nay, call it back and learn for thyself, O slow-of-wit!"

For a while Kirdy watched the sky, hoping vainly that the pigeon might circle back to the castle. Dog-Face bowed his head in thought, his gnarled hands gripped in the breast of his coat.

"Where is the treasure the woman promised us?" asked Witless, who had been wandering around the court.

"Come!" cried Dog-Face harshly, catching him by the sleeve. "The brothers did not name me well. They should have given me your name. We must go and beat the forehead before the little father."

"But father Demid has no treasure for us."

Dog-Face stared at the stupid warrior grimly.

"He will have presents for us, no doubt of that. If he does not sharpen a stake, he will give us ropes and horses to pull our bones loose. Allah! Nay, do not come with us Kirdy. This was none of your doing—watch that she-*djinn*, so that she makes no more enchantment."

Nur-ed-din saw him point at her and guessed at what he had said. When the older warriors stamped out of the courtyard in the swaying gait of riders more at home in the saddle than on the earth, she came close to Kirdy and smiled up at him.

"*Tamen shud!* So it is thy task to take the life of Nur-ed-din?"

For the youth had drawn the heavy curved blade given him by Khlit, and his lips and eyes were resolute.

"Is there faith in thee, O warrior of two swords?"

"Aye," he muttered, stepping back, "Cossack faith, which binds brother to brother, and casts out the traitor and the coward. That is our faith."

"Surely thou art the son of a chief. Grant to Nur-ed-din a moment for prayer and the last ablution, required by the faithful of Islam."

"A moment—aye."

The woman glanced at the courtyard wall where no water jar or even sand was to be found. Obediently she knelt and went through the motions of washing her hands and head—even drawing off her slippers to run her fingers over slim white feet.

THE sunlight, striking through the trees on her arms, dazzled him as he followed the swift and supple movements. The growing warmth made him conscious of the rose scent in the woman's mass of dark hair. When her arms fell to her sides and she straightened on her knees the sword trembled in his hand.

"Strike swiftly, O chief's son," she whispered. "Nay, shall I close my eyes—so?"

Not without a purpose had Nur-ed-din discarded her veil, and now the long lashes fell on silken cheeks. The black robe had dropped from her shoulders and under the tight velvet vest her breast swelled and sank. Her lips drooped pitifully.

Kirdy raised the sword that seemed heavy as an iron sledge. Then he thought that if he closed his eyes it would be easier to strike the steel into her. But with his eyes shut he could not use the point of his sword, and the edge might maim instead of killing her—

Through long lashes the eyes of Nur-ed-din fastened to his tense face, and now she held her breath, white teeth sunk in a crimson lip.

"Nay," he cried hoarsely, "I have never slain a woman. I—"

Unsteadily, he sheathed his sword and led her into the castle, seeking until he found a tower room that had a door with a lock and a key in the lock. Thrusting her within, he turned the key and put it in his girdle, and as he strode away, angry with himself, he heard Nur-ed-din weeping, whimpering softly like a child that has been harshly used.

WITHOUT heeding the growing stiffness in his side, Kirdy hastened to the courtyard and the main gate where the Cossacks on guard could tell him nothing of Demid except that the *ataman* was in the saddle. Here he found Dog-Face and Witless awaiting the return of their leaders and fortifying themselves with a wine jar against the hour of confession.

"The little father will be wild," they cried. "Eh, it will go hard with us. We were set as a guard over that *houri* and she treated us as a fox treats dogs."

They were fast becoming maudlin, and might fall asleep any moment. They had been without sleep for forty-two hours as had Kirdy himself and he could not remember when Demid had been in his blankets last. So Kirdy resolved to find the *ataman* and tell him of the message Nur-ed-din had sent.

He asked for Khlit, and was told that the old Cossack had raided the castle stable and led out three of the Khan's best horses. Arabs crossed with the hardy Turkoman stock—desert beasts, fit for a prince! He had been seen at dawn riding out of the southern gate with Shamaki.

Wandering downhill, Kirdy entered the widest street that ran through the *bazaar* quarter, and halted at sight of an imposing entourage moving toward him. Four negroes trudged under the burden of an open litter, over which two Moslem slaves held a splendid canopy fringed with peacock plumes. Behind it, their long skirts trailing in the dust, followed two palace eunuchs bearing a mighty sword.

In the litter on cloth-of-silver pillows reclined Ayub, and Kirdy, in spite of his anxiety, grinned at the sight.

"What do you say?" growled the big Zaporoghian when the boy hastened to tell him of the carrier pigeon and the word that must have gone to Arap Muhammad Khan. "Well, so much the better. Let the Khan come—we will cut him open like a hare. His fine horses won't leap these walls."

More than one cup had Ayub kissed that morning, but in reality he was quite indifferent to the danger from the horde at Khiva, nor did he pause to consider that there were hundreds of armed Moslems within Urgench as well as without.

"Kirdy, my lad," he said gravely, "they who take up the sword will perish by the sword."

He did consent to go in search of the *ataman* but he would not part with his miniature court. Sighting two scowling Uzbeks in a gateway, he impressed them as cup-bearers and sent the eunuchs for jars of red wine for them to carry. This accomplished, it suited his pleasure to stop every Moslem he met and force him to drink a cup. Ayub was suffering a bit from his arm, which had been set and bound roughly in splints, but he was bent on enjoying himself.

"Only listen!" He halted his bearers at the steps of a mosque and nudged Kirdy. "May the dogs bite me if the sir brothers aren't dancing in there. *'Ahoun!*" He shouted at his followers to enter the mosque and they did so with an ill grace but with sufficient respect for the brace of long pistols that the Cossack had placed beside him on the litter, ready primed.

The pillared outer court was empty but in the central chamber a fire had been kindled from the leaves of the reader's Koran, and the carved wooden stand that held it. Around this fire were dancing men who moved clumsily enough until spurred on by a snap of a long Cossack riding whip. They were the Moslem *imams* or elders, and they were being taught to dance the *kosaka*.

"Hi, *kunaks*," shouted Ayub, well pleased. "Lay on with the whips! Wait, give the old gamesters a chance to wet down their gullets."

"It's Ayub, the Zaporoghian," the warriors exclaimed, and bade the one who held a *balalaika* cease playing. The tired elders rolled their eyes, but Kirdy did not think they were loath to empty the cups that the Uzbeks passed around to them.

"We won't drink with the prophet's dogs!" cried the warriors, "but we'll drink to Ayub and Kirdy. Health to you, *kunaks!*"

They seized the jars and took long gulps, and, forgetting their victims, fell to discussing the treasure that had been found in the castle, and to relating their deeds in the assault while Kirdy paced by the entrance restlessly, looking at the towering marble walls, the mosaic dome, and the gold lettering that ran around the base of the dome—at the artistry and splendor of Islam which the other warriors heeded as little as the smoke blackened wool of a Tatar tent.

"God knows where the *ataman* is," an *esaul* assured him, "but I saw Makshim in the *hammam*."

"In the bath?" Ayub laughed. "That will be worth seeing. Come, ye tigers of Urgench—to the *hammam!*"

Here, in a building not less splendid than the mosque, they searched through vacant, tiled chambers, until the air grew suddenly warmer and they came upon the shirt of the *kuren ataman* hung up to dry, and a moment later Makshim himself seated on a stone bench in a marble room where a tank of warm water gleamed under a lofty dome of colored glass.

The squadron leader was stripped except for a single towel and he held his sword across his knees. Behind him a Cossack warrior leaned on a lance, looking disgusted with the proceedings.

A black slave was shaving the *kuren ataman*, while another washed his feet in an alabaster basin. Both were tremlbing, and Kirdy saw under the clear water of the tank the body of a third.

When they had exchanged greetings, Ayub asked how Makshim liked the bath—whether it had been painful or pleasant.

"Both, Ayub. I have not their speech, so I made signs that they should do with me as with the Turkish princes who come to this place. These black dogs took off my clothes and one washed my shirt, which was all very well. They poured jars of hot and cold water over me, and then the one that lies down there took my arms and legs and cracked the joints. *Hai-a*—I swore at him but he did not understand. He stretched me out on the marble and, by the saints, he began to dance on me with his bare feet. The Jackal, here, pushed him into the pool with a spear. But for the rest, 'tis pleasant enough."

"Hard to believe!" Ayub shook his head in wonderment. "That the dogs of Moslems wash their skins in a place finer than the church of Saint Vasili the Blessed. That their princes permit these slaves to stamp on them. But put on your shirt, Makshim. A plunge in a foaming river is a bath good enough even for the *ataman* of all the Cossacks—and you ought to go and find Demid. Kirdy has some news for him."

"A carrier pigeon was tossed up from the castle and flew south at dawn!" cried the young warrior.

Makshim's brows drew down and he gripped his sword tightly.

"Then we have not a day to waste!" He shrugged powerful shoulders and the familiar, mocking smile touched his lips. "Eh, fledgling, my counsel was best, after all. We are trapped in Urgench."

He pointed his sword tip at the black body under the green water.

"Soon we shall be no more than *that*. Why is it so? Nay, the Donskoi are reveling—they have not their fill of spoil—and two days must pass before they are ready for the road, or the horses are fit to go into the desert."

"*Yei Bogu*," grunted the big Zaporoghian, "by ——, the brothers will not flee from any Khan."

Makshim merely raised his dark brows, and began to hum a Polish love song under his breath.

FROM the bath Kirdy ran to the castle, the blood throbbing in his temples from weariness. The Cossacks on guard told him that Demid had just come in and had thrown himself down to sleep at once. Kirdy pushed past them and found the young *ataman* stretched out in his shirt sleeves on a tiger-skin under a round window where a breath of air relieved the intolerable heat between walls.

Demid opened his eyes when the boy knelt beside him, and listened without change of expression while Kirdy poured out the story of the pigeon.

"No blame to you," he said at last. "The other two had orders to guard the woman."

"Nay, they knew not that carrier pigeons could bear a message from the castle."

Locking his hands beneath his head, Demid smiled and his gray eyes were friendly.

"And did they know the trickery that lies in a woman's tongue? Did you? What now?"

"Little father, I am troubled. The *kuren ataman*, Makshim, said that two days must pass before the Cossacks and their horses can take the road. We will be caught in Urgench, and the Moslems within the walls will rise against us—"

Demid ceased smiling and looked at the boy gravely.

"Some day, little brother, you will be the leader, not of a squadron but of a horde. You are fearless and your thoughts go out to the dangers that lie ahead. But before that day comes you will see many things. Now, sleep!"

He turned on his side, adding:

"Khlit is in command of the outposts; his quarters are in the red stone house nearest the bazaar gate. Ivashko watches the treasure—go there."

With the last word he was breathing deeply again, and Kirdy felt that his trouble had been lightened. Moving away quietly he walked through the torrid glare of the street to the small house where he saw some fine black ponies tethered and Ivashko with several others sitting smoking.

By then his feet lagged and his head drooped. He stretched himself out on his *svitka* and fell asleep almost at once.

It did not seem any time before some one came and pulled the shirt from his shoulder to look at his wound. He was conscious of an odor of burning oil from the lantern beside him and of leather and sweat-soaked sheepskins. He looked up into the deep-set eyes of the Wolf.

Other hands washed the hardened blood from his side and bound the torn flesh with mud, held in place by a turban cloth. The touch of the mud cooled his veins and he became drowsy again, though he was aware that two men were squatting over the lantern.

"O father of battles," a voice began in Tatar gutturals, "I have looked upon the millet seeds again, and they are red—red."

Kirdy peered over his shoulder and recognized the lined face of Shamaki, ruddy in the glow from the oil lamp.

"Some have died but it is written that the graves of many lie not far from here," the voice went on. "It is time that your servant goes to his own place."

"You have been paid," Khlit's growl made answer.

The twain were silent, and Kirdy closed his eyes. The sleep that had come upon him was the first in fifty hours and it held him like iron fetters.

"Listen to me, O *bahadur*," the voice of Shamaki began again, persuasively, "do not scorn the shadow of fate. Go from this place where peril breeds like snakes in a swamp. Take your men and go. *Y'allah!* Was your servant not once a khan? It is true. Some honor I had—my herds grazed on the Jaick. The Turkomans came—may dogs litter on their graves—they took my herds and my children they slew with the sword. I was their slave.

"In time I went north and west to the land of the *Aga Padishah*, of the White Emperor of the Muscovites, knowing well that he had more spears to his command than Arap Muhammad Khan. Many times I told him of the jewels in Urgench. He listened and he asked tidings of the caravan trade. What do I know of merchants—I who have hunted with eagles in the Ak-Tagh?"

The old Tatar paused as if gathering to himself the memories of the past.

"To everything there is an end. You spoke to me in a *serai* of the City of the White Walls, and it was agreed between us that if you could enter the presence of the White Emperor, I would add my word to yours. So you gained the freedom of these five hundred—and I came likewise, being weary of the court of the emperor. *Ai-a*, I have seen the Turkomans rub their beards in the dust. I have spoken."

There was a jangling of chains, a scraping, and ruffling of feathers, a brief word from Khlit, and Shamaki passed out of the room taking with him the great golden eagle.

Drowsily Kirdy opened his eyes and beheld Khlit occupied with a strange task. He was filling two saddle bags with millet, which he poured in a cupful at a time. And with each cup he took up a precious stone from the caskets that lay open under the lantern. Now the yellow light gleamed on the shadowy surface of jade, now it sparkled fiercely on a many-faced diamond, or lurked in the depths of the great emeralds.

When the bags were filled, Khlit laced them up and strapped them together. Then he blew out the light and the boy sank again into the coma of exhaustion.

GRAY dawn was stealing through the round window and the room was empty when he sat up, wide awake. Men were talking in the courtyard, and he heard the stamping of hoofs and snorting of restive horses.

He was very hungry, and the first thing he did was to fill a bowl with gruel from the pot that had been cooked by the warriors on guard. Then he broke away the dried mud from his side and found that the bleeding had stopped. At first he listened idly to the talk of Ivashko and the Cossacks; then he became curious and saw that they had placed the articles taken from the castle in packs and the packs were being roped on Turkoman ponies.

"Eh," Ivashko was saying, "at the council of the squadron leaders in the afternoon Demid told them. It was like a flea in the ear. All night they searched for their men and horses."

"It is time," some one grumbled. "Three days have passed since the castle was taken."

"How, three days?" demanded Kirdy looking up from his bowl. "It is not yet two."

Ivashko laughed.

"Harken to the *oùchar!* He has slept for ten watches. The first night I dressed his wound, and the second Khlit and Shamaki woke him up, but he has made up for lost time."

Kirdy sprang up, and caught the *esaul's* arm.

"Is this the third day?"

"Aye, and Arap Muhammad Khan will be here before it is past. The *ataman* says a pigeon was loosed from the castle with a message for Khiva."

"And the Cossacks—"

"Take the road within the hour."

Running into the street Kirdy saw that the squadrons were forming in the cleared space that stretched down to the bazaar; wagons, loaded with grain and piled high with plunder, were being drawn into line by Dog-Face and Witless, who were quite sober and intent on the work in hand—certainly they had not been planted on stakes by the *ataman*, or drawn by horses.

Where, two days ago, all had been drunken disorder, a common purpose now reigned. The *kuren atamans* were taking position at the head of their detachments, and one of Makshim's lancers had raised the standard of the white falcon. Dog-Face, catching sight of the boy, called out cheerfully:

"Time to take the road, lad. *Nà kòn*—the order has been given. Arap Muhammad Khan must be drawing near by now and we will give him a taste of Cossack steel."

From the flat roofs and mat-covered alleys of the *bazaar* dense curls of smoke were rising into the morning mist, and, struck by a sudden fear, Kirdy looked back at the castle. A red tongue of flame licked out of the gallery where Nur-ed-din's quarters had been. The Cossacks had fired both the castle and the bazaar.

Striding back into the house, the boy caught up his saddle and sought out the piebald pony in Khlit's string of captured Arabs. Jerking the girth savagely, he cantered into the courtyard of the Khan's dwelling and dismounted. The Cossacks had withdrawn from the place and smoke was thickening in the mist overhead. In a tower room Kirdy had locked Nur-ed-din, and if no one had freed the woman she would be burned to death.

It would be a simple matter to leave her where she was, but Kirdy felt as if her dark eyes were fixed upon him, and her lips were praying to him. He could not ride away and leave a woman to be burned.

Threading through the corridors, he felt his way up through the stinging smoke in the garden tower and came to the door of Nur-ed-din's prison. He could hear nothing except the snapping of flames below him, but, pushing open the door he saw the slave of Arap Muhammad Khan standing facing him, her eyes wide with hope that faded as soon as she recognized the young Cossack. She was veiled and she followed obediently when he took her by the hand and led her down the dark stair into the clearer air of the courtyard.

He could feel the pulse throbbing in her fingers, but his fingers did not tremble. The witchery of her beauty cast no spell over him and he looked upon her only as a Moslem slave, sullen with anger. Then he dropped her hand as if it had been a nettle.

SITTING a gray Arab stallion beside his pony, Khlit was looking at him grimly, half shrouded by the drifting smoke.

"Eh, you puppy," the old Cossack growled, "what good is there in you? First you sleep like a peasant for two days; then you sneak off with a woman. What horses or weapons have you taken in Urgench? None."

Kirdy hung his head, not justifying himself with words because he understood that his grandsire was very angry, or amused at him; and Khlit, bending down, recognized Nur-ed-din with a grunt.

"Is it clear to you, Kirdy," he observed after a moment, "that it is easier to play with serpents than to meddle with such beauties as this?"

"Aye, Khlit."

"Then give Nur-ed-din this gift."

A tiny roll of paper fell into Kirdy's hand, and he started. Spreading it out eagerly, he stared at the square of rice paper no larger than his thumb nail, and at the scrolls and curlicues that were Turkish words written with a henna pencil. A gasp from Nur-ed-din showed that she had recognized her missive, sent on the carrier pigeon.

"How"—he cried and fell silent, because Khlit did not like useless questioning. After a moment he handed the paper to Nur-ed-din and said slowly:

"Was it the golden eagle of Shamaki that brought down the pigeon, when you, Khlit, and the Tatar were on outpost, that morning? Then you must have been to the south of Urgench."

"Aye, the golden eagle. It was a fine sight."

Kirdy reflected. Khlit must have sighted the pigeon heading south in the clear sky of early sunrise—the eyes of the old Cossack were keener than he chose to admit—and he would have suspected that a message had been sent in this fashion from the town.

So Shamaki had loosed the eagle. When they rode back to the Cossack lines Dog-Face had told them about the trick played by Nur-ed-din.

"You did well," Khlit conceded, "to take her from the fire, for the slave does not lack courage. We were well served by thee," he added to the woman, "because the Cossack brothers had need of a spur. It is our nature, O Light of the World, to revel overmuch when we have come in from the road. Were it not for thy missive, the warriors would still be frolicking in Urgench, and so—farewell to thee."

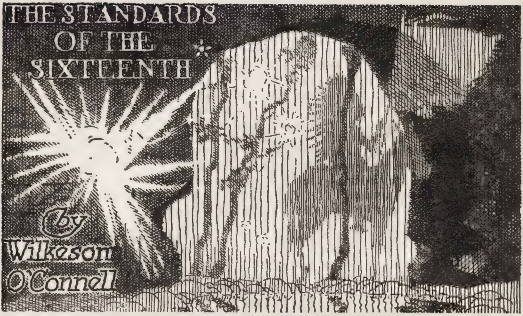
Nur-ed-din threw the crumpled paper on the ground and spat at them. Tearing at her hair, she cried shrilly—anger drawing from her the lamentation that fear had not inspired. And the roar of flames behind her accompanied her cries.

But Kirdy was in the saddle of the piebald pony, riding like one possessed down the column to take his place by the standard. He was clear of blame, and he had made a raid across the border. No longer would the warriors call him *oùchar*. He was a Cossack.

Drawing rein sharply he made his pony rear and swerve into position between Ayub and the new standard bearer. He thrust his *kalpak* well back on his shaven head and, putting his left hand on his hip—wound or no wound—joined in the song that began as the first squadron started forward—

"Shall we sit idle?
Follow Death's dance!
Pick up your bridle,
Saddle and lance—
Brothers, advance!"

TO BE CONCLUDED



Author of "King's Bounty."

THE standards of the Sixteenth? But all the Army knows that the Sixteenth carries no standards. Still, it might be more correct to say that all the Army has forgotten that fact. Sometimes the Eighth remembers, and then there is trouble; for the Sixteenth did carry colors once—and again.

You have heard how, when the second and third squadrons rode up the Upper North Platte seven days after the massacre, they found the Bustards and the other officers at the top of a knoll, their scalps upon their heads and lying as they had fallen. When the Sioux did not mutilate the dead it was a tribute to past courage. Of all the men on the hillock but two had been meddled with, and they were not scalped. Little Tim Fogharty and Lester Bliss, who had carried the colors on the fatal day, had had their hands cut off at the wrists; and it did not appease the regiment to reflect that the flags they had followed through a hundred hostile lines and a score of campaigns were being trundled on a travois in the tail of a dirty, fleeing, Indian camp.

They rode as though the devil drove them; but when Brooks caught the Indians a thousand miles up the trail, it was small satisfaction that the Sixteenth got. Every buck, squaw, and papoose told a different tale concerning the standards, barring Running Horse, himself, who kept his own counsel; a talent that he exhibited to the day of his death. Certain it was, however, that the colors were not in the Indian camp; the regiment satisfied themselves of that. And then, before they could extract the secret or comb the trail—either course would have consumed one man's lifetime—they had orders to proceed to Arizona, where they spent the next few years in hunting Geronimo.

Remember that this was the West of the terrible distances, through which news filtered with curious inconsequence. Like the colors themselves, the report of their loss was dropped somewhere along the trail; the War Department failed to provide new ones; and the Sixteenth successfully concluded a ghastly, grinding, cactus-spurred campaign without them. They came to a rest by a crusted spring in New Mexico, where the black brothers of the Eighth had arrived two hours before them. As the white regiment swung up the trail, a big, buffalo buck glanced curiously down the powdered line, and then, with his lip-tips knocking at his ears, whispered behind his hand to a mate. The grin and mutter spread through the black ranks till it met the inevitable indiscreet who is ever present to maintain the regimental reputation of the most courageously ——foolish blackguards

**An Off-the-Trail Story. See First Contents Page* that the sun has ever looked upon. As the jingle of the dismounting regiment died away, there came the tiny pause that precedes an order. It was unexpectedly filled by a dulcet, clear-calling negro voice, calculated to reach every ear in camp:

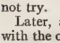
"Yea, Sixteenth! Wha' yo' standards?"

It was said afterward—there were no court-martials, thanks to the distances—that in that first stunned moment, the officers of the Sixteenth might have held their men, if they had tried. This is problematical, while it is certain that they did not try.

Later, after the casualty, they charged with the officers of the Eighth; and, by dint of the flat of the saber and iron-shod hoofs—a buffalo soldier hates to be stepped on—pried the sweating, straining, cursing regiments apart. Dog-tired and sullen they camped on separate sides of the spring, and next morning went their several ways; the Sixteenth breaking camp first. As they filed by in threatening silence, a bandaged buck looked up:

"Yea, Sixteenth, wha'—" but his captain's hand had caught his mouth in time.

The incident, and that particular phase of the regimental history, were ended.



THE next years were like those just past; winter campaigns in the South; summer campaigns in the North; scattered graves along the unmarked trails, and in unnamed cañons; the Civil War veterans dropping out to go prospecting, railroad-building, cow-punching, and their places taken by dream-driven boys from the East, out to "get their Injun." In twenty years the massacre had ceased to be a memory and become a tradition, and the regiment was at last resting in the lake-lapped greenness of Fort Ethan Allen. The Shoshone War was a thing of the past; five-stripers talked of the good, old days, and sang of the smell of the sage-brush; while the rookies held that army life was dull.

Came orders for Cuba; and ten days later—transportation was nearly as disgraceful as the commissary—found the Sixteenth debarking on one side of the Tampa depot, while the Eighth crawled out of a troop-train on the other. An irresponsible, gray-wooled sergeant took a long look at the other newcomers' insignia, slapped his thigh in foolish glee, and yelled across the rails—

"Yea, Sixteenth! Wha' yo' standards?"

There were still men in the Sixteenth who remembered the taunt and its consequences, but they were a long way now from fervent youth and New Mexico; therefore it was a rookie who answered, cheerfully—

"Donno', Eighth; where are yours?"

Truth to tell, the youngster—and half the regiment with him—did not know what a standard might be.

The Sixteenth distinguished itself in Cuba, and again and again in the Islands; was sent home to recruit and recuperate; was returned to the tropics for one last expedition against the Moros; and once more found itself among the mesas—watchfully waiting through one leaden winged month after another. At last the word came; and Pershing, bound by his own Government to a futile ineffectiveness, led the way to a grueling campaign that had but one thing to recommend it—it was better than none at all. The Eighth was on hand also, with long memories and no increase of discretion; but the Sixteenth took the insult as a compliment. Were they not the finest regiment of cavalry that ever watered horse? Admittedly—save by fifteen others—they were. Therefore, if they got along without standards, it might be better if the rest of the Army did likewise. Useless appendages. Even the officers, who knew the reason for the absence, felt that it conferred distinction, rather than disgrace upon the outfit. Moreover, as, during recent events, the Eighth had lost their officers and drifted from one end of Chihuahua without aim, guidance, or reasonable excuse, to the other, it was felt that the less they called attention to themselves or anything else the better for the Army in general. So the Sixteenth merely replied—

"*We* don't *need* colors," and went into camp for the rest of the winter.

THEN the United States was at last admitted to be at war with the German Empire, and the War Department feverishly began to reorganize everything in sight. Naturally, they commenced with the regimental morale of the Regulars; for the old outfits, suddenly swollen from a scant six hundred to a full two thousand men, were in grave danger of losing their individuality and, possibly, their effectiveness. The guidons and battle flags were the logical points from which to work; wherefore it was decreed that the regimental standards were to be brought up to date by the addition of badges and insignia commemorating the victories and campaigns in which the organizations had taken part; and that the recruits were to be taught the full significance of each one.

Then it was officially discovered that the Sixteenth had no standards—and had had none for half a century of nearly continuous active service. Between one breath and the next an order was given for their replacement; and two months later the regiment, badly decimated by recruits, curiously unpacked a pair of colors, yellow of shade, handsomely embroidered, goldenly fringed, nicely designed, gratifyingly honorable in significance, and bran-bran new. The seven-year-old granddaughter of the Civil War colonel presented them to the officer in command; the men cheered; and all agreed that it was a pretty ceremony and a cute kid. The angels knew that it went no deeper than their sun-burned hides.

Now, by all the unwritten laws of war and psychology the Sixteenth should have loathed those standards; but soldiers and recruits are seldom logical. They were childishly pleased with the sumptuous, yellow things; learned the significances joyously; explained them, even, to other, bored regiments to whom colors were no novelty, but nuisances—albeit of a somewhat sacred character. The officers, noting the regiment's enthusiasm and no lessening of the growing morale, voted the colors a success; and the colonel reported as much to the War Department.

In the middle of the year the regiment was quietly shipped to France; dismounted, and put into a training camp to learn the art of modern warfare. That mastered, they were cautiously placed in a quiet sector where they acquitted themselves as well as the circumstances would permit. With this comparatively slight baptism, they were given the place of honor and danger in the Argonne sector, and their objectives pointed out to them. They took them handily in fourteen hours, and lay down to sleep; while the iron wave passed beyond.

At reveille they awoke, and took stock. The casualties, which had early included the standard bearers, though regrettable, were reasonable; the affair had gone like clockwork; it was another star in their crown of glory, another badge on the colors, which, by the way, where were they?

The second and third squadrons did not know; and, though slightly worried and puzzled by the colonel's vehemence, did not care. The first squadron was equally indifferent; but most of them could remember seeing the colors at one place or another during the previous day, and, always the report went, "Carried by one of Pershing's 'Paches, sir."

"Pershing's 'Paches?"

"Yes, sir. Not one I knew myself, sir, but a big buck Injun on a little, clay-colored horse."

The colonel relieved himself by a few heartfelt words, and ended by stating that they were the only regiment in the service that could have behaved that way,—which was perfectly true—and that they had better return to their —— estaminets as soon as they had found out where those colors were. The men, sulkily, but with still unruffled consciences, were more than willing. They could not see where they had been at fault. The objectives had been taken in a soldierly manner; and what the——did it matter if a Scout had carried the standards? They and the Apaches were ancient and honorable enemies; they and the Scouts were comrades and firm friends. What troubled the colonel never occurred to them—the hard facts that the Apache Scouts were on another sector, and that there was, or should have been, no horse nearer than thirty miles. His conclusion was that the entire first squadron was shell-shocked and seeing things; but he ordered out a detachment to search for the colors.

THEY hunted in couples over the new-taken ground; asking questions, learning nothing, and being jeered at for their pains. About noon the Hun began a little long-range strafing; and Hennessy, a five-striper, with Gordon, an American from British Columbia who had returned to his own country to re-up, came out on a little plain irregularly surrounded by forest. It was pocked with craters and shell-holes. In the center stood the one remaining wall of a building pierced by an arch torn larger than ever the mason had built it; the whole doubled and inverted in the dead water of an enormous crater close by. The minie-shells sang overhead at some target beyond;

and, standing like a statue in front of the arch, was an American Indian, his face withered like a russet apple in May under the war-paint, and a bonnet, eared with ermine-skins, that was long enough to reach the heels of the little mustard-colored cayuse on which he was mounted. Whipping in the breeze above his head were the standards of the Sixteenth.

With sighs of relief the troopers started for the ruin; Hennessy remarking that he had never seen a 'Pache in that get-up before. When they were half way across the clearing a shell, pitched lower than the rest, clipped the top of the wall, and a stone toppled. The soldiers gave an involuntary shout of warning; and the stone, to all appearance passing through the Indian, bounded into the crater, shattering the reflections into bits of pigmented light. The warrior quietly gathered his reins together, rode through the arch, and passed from sight behind the wall.

"Wait! Wait!" shouted the troopers; and they broke into a trot.

They looked at each other in blank dismay—the space behind the wall was as lonesome as the prints of their own brogans on the crater's edge. The Hun found the range of the clearing; other stones fell, and a moment later two American cavalrymen, trembling as never a shell could have shaken them, were snuggling in a hole between a satisfactorily dead German and a nest of small, black ants.

Having, for once, kept their mouths discreetly shut, they turned up at four-thirty to make their report to the colonel. More in sorrow than anger, and sarcasm than either, he politely asked their opinion of the phenomenon.

"Well, sir," replied Gordon, "I've been trying to place that buck, for I know I've seen him before; and at last I got him. He's a heap big chief by the name of Running Horse, from a Crow reservation up in Manitoba."

"Running Horse!" exclaimed the adjutant. "Why, that was the leader of the Sioux who broke Bustard!"

"On the Upper North Platte, nigh fifty years ago," confirmed Hennessey. "And he slipped over the northern border afterwards, in a snowstorm raised by the ghost-dancin' of t'other medicine-man."

The colonel snorted. He preferred his own brand of superstition, which he referred to as "the wonders of modern science, sir!" He fumbled in a high-piled heap of mail upon his desk, and spoke too politely for a soldier's comfort.

"Do I gather, then, that your theory is that an octogenarian redskin has left his hunting-ground in western Canada to hocus the new standards of this—blessed—regiment by some occult heap big native medicine?"

"Well, sir, something of the sort. Least, that's about the way it looks, don't it?" Gordon was reasonable.

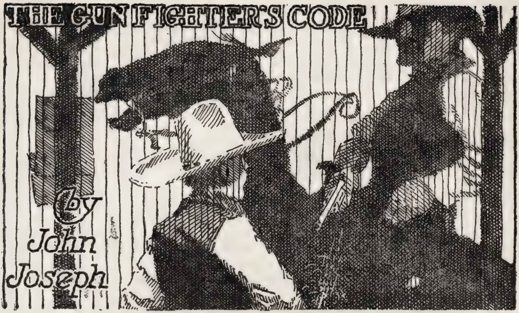
"Hmpt! Would it phase the aforesaid theory any to learn that these papers," he held up a crumpled *New York Times* two months old, "give a full account of the death, and burial with all regimental—I mean tribal—honors and ceremonies, of the heap big chief under discussion?"

The men looked at each other, but neither withered worth a half-bit.

"And that," said the Irishman, with what the colonel considered contumacious conviction, "is why there were no hoof-prints under the arch!"

THAT is all. Running Horse had died without a word concerning the old standards; the regiment preferred to say nothing about the new, for which they promptly, and without orders, ceased searching. They have not met the Eighth since—luckily. The colonel talked a bit about regimental traditions; and the War Department conveniently turned its attention to a reorganization that took small account of regimental morale; again neglecting replacement.

But if ever Japan joins with Russia to move against the Celestial Republic, they will discover, as did the Germans in '17-'18, that the Sixteenth regiment of United States Cavalry can fight very satisfactorily without standards. In short, they would not have them at any price; the more, as Sergeant Hennessey maintains that Running Horse always leads off with the old colors in one hand and the new ones in the other. Hennessey, as the Irish say, is a gifted man and can not help himself. But the regiment, particularly the first squadron, prefer to shun the second sight. If the old buck wants the standards, he can have them—all of 'em—any of 'em. The Sixteenth will not stand in his way.



THE GUN FIGHTER'S CODE

by John Joseph

Author of "A Fool and His Fiddle," "Ethics of a Fighter," etc.

THE old-time frontier rules for a gun-scrap were never on anybody's law books, but in a mining and cattle town like Porcupine they had all the force of law, just the same. If a man lived up to the code, the thing was settled the minute the smoke cleared away; but if he tried out some little new stunt of his own, the camp was likely enough to get hostile and take the stretch out of a string of new inch rope. Nevertheless there *was* a bit of leeway to the rules, and it sometimes happened that a bad-man came out second best because the other fellow used his head for what it was made for.

One of the times when a little headwork paid big dividends was the time the "Smilin' Kid" mixed it with "Red Bill" Horton. Red Bill had five notches in the stock of his forty-four when he hit the Two-Color country, and during the next six years he had occasion to cut three more; so he was counted a plumb bad actor and a dangerous man any way you took him. He had hot-footed it out of Texas only a couple of long jumps ahead of the sheriff, by all accounts; but he brought a fat roll along and bought a big ranch and a lot of cattle, and at the time of his run-in with the Kid he was counted one of the big men of the county.

Tall and boney and red-headed, with an undershot jaw and a hump-backed nose as thin as a hatchet, he was one of your keen-eyed, gash-mouthed buzzards that want all the money in the world and don't care how they get it. A loud talker and free with his gab when he had a drink or two in him, he often boasted that he "took what he wanted when he wanted it, and them that didn't like his ways could lump it and go to ——."

But the man had friends, for all that; for a real he-man always has his following—no matter how ornary he is—and Red Bill had nerve and proved it often enough. The sheep-men he fought with rifles, he fought his own kind with a six-gun and asked no favors, he hired green Missourians on his hay ranch and licked them regularly with his fists, and the rest of the world he brow-beat and bullied or wheedled, according to circumstances and with his eye on the spot where the most money lay.

His trouble with the Smilin' Kid started over a little water-right that in all justice belonged to an old man named Tom Mellin. Tom and his old woman lived on a little shoe-string ranch up on Rebel Creek a couple of miles from camp. Tom made his living raising vegetables, which he peddled around the town, and everybody called him "Spuds" for short. There were only four or five acres of plow-land, but Spuds managed to scratch a living out of it, and the vital thing about the ranch was the little stream of Rebel Creek that he used for his irrigating.

Spuds had bought the place from a chap named Ormsby, but in making out the papers there was one thing Spuds overlooked. Ormsby never had filed on the water-right, but the first intimation Spuds had of that fact was when Red Bill Horton jumped it and sent the sheriff to serve an injunction. Nobody but a prize hog would have done such a trick, but Red Bill had a little dry corner that he couldn't water from his own ditches, so he played the hog and took advantage of the law, and Spuds Mellin was left high and dry. Of course the old man was all broke up about it, for without the water the ranch was worthless, and right or wrong he had no money to fight a man like Horton. Naturally enough he told his story around town, and some one presently told the Smilin' Kid about it.

Now the Kid wasn't much of a hand to stick his nose into other people's affairs, but he was a stickler for fair play and always had a hand for the under dog; so he studied the matter over for awhile and finally sent old "Injun" Charlie out to hunt for Spuds and bring him around to the Resort Club bar.

The Kid was only twenty-five at this time, but he owned the Club and had already won his spurs as a fighting man, and no man in the county was better known. He had a reputation as a square-shooter at any kind of a game, so when Injun Charlie presently brought Spuds around to the Club. the old man was glad to take advice and do anything the Kid suggested.

The Kid used to often say that necessity was the mother of invention, and that a man never knew what he could do till the time came and he had to do it. Nine times out of ten, he said, there was a way out of a scrape, if a man just put his head to work and set his teeth and stayed with it. So he put it up to Spuds that way, and promised to help him out; and the old man went home feeling a lot better about it, for with a man like the Kid to back him up he felt that he had a chance to win out yet.

But this thing fairly beat the Kid for a long time, for Red Bill had the law on his side and there didn't seem to be any way to beat the man. The planting season passed, and Spuds' little orchard and truck patch were drying up, and still the Kid couldn't hit the button with a workable idea. His word was pledged, however, and his pride kept punching him along; so he kept at it and finally the inspiration came. It was all simple enough and wouldn't cost much; so he sent old Injun Charlie after Spuds once more, and when the Kid presently outlined the scheme to him the old man's wrinkled old face blossomed out in a smile a foot wide.

IT WAS a clever plan the Kid had figured out, and it was based on the fact that Rebel Creek, like many another small Western stream, was dry in some places. There was a deep bed of gravel and boulders in the bottom of the gulch, the water ran through the sand and only came to the surface where the bed-rock was close to the top. Spuds' old headgate tapped the stream near the upper end of his garden, and only a few steps above this spot the creek bed was dry as a bone. So the old man sparred around with a shovel till he found a place where the bed-rock was shallow, then got a team and a scraper and cleaned the gravel out down to the rock. This done, he dug a new ditch and connected it up with the old one, then put in a dirt dam and raised the water high enough to run into the ditch, and the job was done!

Of course Red Bill missed the water right away, and came tearing up on horse to jump the old man about it. Red Bill was wearing his best fighting grin when he swung down from his horse, and the spot that always showed on the pinnacle of his sharp nose when he was riled up, was shining like a white blister. Spuds was a man of peace and growing old and helpless, so Red Bill had everything his own way.

He cursed and blasphemed and shook his big red fist in Spuds' face till he ran short of breath, then tore the shovel from the old man's hands and cut the dam. Poor old Spuds just stood helplessly by and watched the water wash his little dam away, while Red Bill muttered to himself and caved the dirt into the water with the shovel. Finally, when the dam had completely disappeared, Horton gave Spuds a final blowing up, and warned him not to touch the water again, then mounted his horse and struck out at a hard gallop for Porcupine.

Now Spuds had talked too much around camp, and everybody knew that the Smilin' Kid had put him up to the trick he had played; so it didn't take Red Bill two minutes to find out where the trouble lay, and two minutes more found him striding up to the Club bar.

The Kid was behind the bar. Red Bill was grinning, but the white spot on his nose was shining like a star and the Kid knew exactly what he had come for. Red Bill ordered a drink and gulped it down, then threw his money on the bar and got right down to business.

"I understand that you're the man that's backin' old Spuds Mellin up to steal my water!" he barked, grinning and boring the Kid with his fighting eye.

The Kid wasn't the kind to help a man out when he was bent on picking a row, so he just smiled and kept a sharp eye on Red Bill and waited for his next move.

"How about it?" Red Bill asked impatiently, when he saw that the Kid didn't mean to answer his question. "Let's have the facts: The old man dammed the creek and started stealing my water, and I hear that you're the chap that put him up to it! How about it?"

"No, my friend," the Kid drawled, "I didn't put anybody up to steal any water; I simply suggested that it might be a good idea to *prospect* for water, where there wasn't any *running on the surface*. And—I told Spuds that if he found any, to just dam it up and take it out."

"Dam——!" Red Bill exploded. "No man has any right to dam up water that belongs to somebody else by law, and you know it without anybody telling you!"

The Kid smiled and caressed his chin:

"There's water running around in all sorts of places under ground, Mr. Horton," he suggested politely. "Spuds Mellin prospected around and found some of it—under ground, understand—and what he's got there now is a *flowing well!* Have you looked up the law, my friend?"

This stumped Red Bill and took a lot of wind out of his sails, for the man was quick to catch the possible legal quirk to the matter. It turned out that the Kid was bluffing about the law part of it, but Red Bill never found it out till it was too late. At any rate there was food for thought, so he studied for awhile with his glance on the floor. He wasn't exactly backing out of a fight, after half-starting one, but the Smilin' Kid was a plumb dangerous man with a gun and Horton knew it, and no doubt he felt that it would be better to look the law up and see where he stood, before he mixed it with the Kid. Another thing; he had taken the water away from Spuds by law, and it wasn't exactly logical to go outside of the law now, and—well, a man *does* have better stomach for a scrap when he knows the law is on his side.

Anyhow Red Bill wilted for a minute, then blustered to cover the thing:

"Law!" he rasped, with a blow of his fist on the bar, "Well, if that's your game I'll sure as —— give you all the *law* you want! And another thing: I'll stand for no more monkey-business. Listen: I cut that dam up there, and it stays cut! And the first man that butts in on the thing will have me to settle with—personally! Get the idea?"

Red Bill whirled and stalked out, and the instant the door closed behind him the crowd broke into a laugh. A second later the door swung wide open with a bang, and Red Bill stepped in with his hand on his gun. The crowd fell silent.

"Any of you fellers got a call to laugh—now?" he demanded, with a wide grin.

Nobody had anything to say. Red Bill glared around for a moment, then turned without a word and passed out, and that was the end of that.

The Kid studied the matter over and talked with some of the men, and they finally decided to take up a collection and help Spuds fight the case in court. The Kid started the ball rolling with a twenty-dollar piece, and by night the collection amounted to over four hundred dollars; and the upshot of the matter was that Spuds presently brought suit against Horton for two thousand dollars' damage.

Horton was wild about it, but there was no such thing as side-stepping the law in a case of this kind, and the time soon came when Red Bill found himself on the defensive in court. It turned out to be a new kind of case, with no law to cover it, so it might have been tried without a jury. But Horton's lawyers overlooked a bet there, and the case went before twelve men instead of one.

Horton was a big man, with a lot of influence at the County Seat, and no doubt he would have won hands down if the question had been left to a politician—judge, but with a jury he didn't have a chance. At any rate Mellin won, and the jury awarded him five hundred dollars. Horton was all for taking the case to the Supreme Court, but his lawyers pointed out that the whole town of Porcupine was behind Spuds, that even if he won, it would be sure to cost him ten times as much as the water was worth; so Red Bill finally swallowed his pride to save his pocket-book and mailed Spuds a check for the amount.

NO DOUBT Red Bill fully intended at the time to let sleeping dogs lie, but the whole country was laughing at him behind his back, and the report was going the rounds that he was side-stepping the row he had started with the Smilin' Kid, and of course Red Bill presently got wise to what was going on. He realized that he was losing prestige, that his reputation as a fighter was at stake, so he finally sent word to the Kid that he would be calling on him within a day or two.

This meant a gun-fight, and everybody knew it. It was a common thing in those days to send word in this manner, and once the die was cast there was no such thing as backing out. It simply meant a challenge to a duel according to mining camp rules.

It made a lot of excitement, for while both men had been shot up a number of times, neither had as yet come out second best in any sort of row. The camp was all for the Smilin' Kid, and the miners were laying odds that Horton would get the worst of it; but with the cattle-men, and over around the County Seat at Highlands, Horton was picked to win.

Now the Kid fancied a thirty-eight and always carried two of them, in holsters sewed to his trousers legs in front and just below the pockets. Carrying the smaller guns was a clever idea, for all reports to the contrary they are quicker on the draw, simply because they are lighter. Sewing the holsters to his trousers was another of the Kid's ideas, and whatever the old-timers might have to say about this new-fangled style, they couldn't argue that anybody had so far beaten the Kid on the draw. In fact there were many who claimed that beating the Kid and his freak ideas was a thing that simply couldn't be done.

Still, Red Bill was known to be a marvel with a six-gun, and while the Kid might have the advantage in one way, Horton had it in another; for the man that has his mind made up to kill somebody always has a little advantage of the man who doesn't really *want* to kill and carries a gun only for self-defense. The idea is that one knows exactly what he is going to do, while the other is a little in doubt; and that is one of the reasons why an old-time killer sometimes lasted so long: He passed the fighting word, then went for his gun a split second ahead of the other fellow. And the Smilin' Kid knew well enough that Red Bill planned this very thing, so he laid his own plans to beat him.

It was about ten in the morning of the second day that Red Bill rode up in front of the Club Resort. Injun Charlie and perhaps a dozen more were lounging about on the big covered porch. Red Bill called Charlie over and ordered him to tell the Kid that he wanted to see him. Charlie stepped inside. Red Bill turned his horse so that his right side was next to the door, then carefully worked his gun around into exactly the right spot.

A moment later the Kid stepped out. He was smiling and had both hands in his trousers pockets, and Horton knew well enough that his own life wouldn't be worth a nickel if he drew and fired without warning; for the men had stepped out of the line of fire to line up on the edge of the porch with their hands on their guns, and Red Bill wasn't in any doubt about what that meant.

It seemed that the thing wasn't going to prove as easy as Red Bill had thought for, now that he was face to face with the Kid. Conditions were not exactly what he had expected. He was up against something he didn't quite understand. No doubt he had planned just to ride up and call the Kid out and pass the fighting word, and the thing would be over, just like that. But this was something different, for the Kid had lounged carelessly out, with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face, and looking as if a gun-fight was about the last thing in the world to expect. He had expected the Kid to stamp out with his fighting togs on and all primed for business, but the Kid looked as if he actually didn't understand what he had come for.

But the Kid looked too careless and unconcerned, and there was hidden menace in that smile. Red Bill didn't understand the situation, but there was something wrong—somewhere—and no doubt his mind went back to the many stories he had heard about the Kid's skill with a gun and a habit he had of outwitting his enemy. There was the two Peets boys, for instance; possibly the most dangerous pair of killers that ever tramped the West. The Kid had killed "Arizona" Peets in a fair fight, and later on when Arizona's brother "Nig" came on to avenge the killing, the Kid put him out of the way too. And report had it that he had out-smarted them both, which was true enough.

At any rate, whatever might have been running in his mind, Red Bill hesitated. He sized the Kid up from head to heels, and his glance rested for some time on the two thirty-eights resting against his thighs. Still he hesitated, for a fight with the Smilin' Kid was no joke, and nobody knew it better than Red Bill Horton. But there was no such thing as backing out now. The thing was simply impossible, so Red Bill finally pulled his horse's head a little to the right, then pulled his hat down tight on his head. You might have heard your watch ticking.

Then Red Bill caught the Kid's eye.

"I believe you put in a little testimony at that water trial?" Horton said, with a little catch in his voice.

"I shore did," replied the Kid, easily, "and I'm —— proud of it!"

The white spot came out on Red Bill's nose like a splash of paint.

"The —— you are?" he barked. "Well, I'm here to tell you something: When you swore that Mellin didn't dam up runnin' water, you swore to a —— lie!"

Then Red Bill went after his gun.

He drew like a flash, a shot rang out and Horton's gun dropped to the ground. The Kid was still smiling. The smoke was curling up from the muzzle of a short-barreled thirty-eight in his right hand. Horton dropped the reins and grabbed his right elbow with his left hand. His face twisted in a horrible grin of pain, the blood poured over his hand and ran down on his leg. The horse started to walk away, and the Kid sprang down to catch him. He turned the animal half-way round, then glanced up at Red Bill.

"Maybe that will sort of hold you for awhile!" he smiled up at Horton.

The Kid still had the gun in his hand. Red Bill glanced at it, then down at the two guns still in the Kid's holsters.

"You —— cowardly cur!" he grated, twisting around in the saddle and rubbing at his broken arm. "You had that gun in your pocket! All the time!"

The Kid smiled at the epithet. He could afford to—under the circumstances. "I shore did," he said, "and I have no apologies to make for it. You came here to kill *me*. Like all of your kind you planned to take what amounts to an unfair advantage. And you thought you had it, because you'd know exactly when the thing was going to start, and I wouldn't. You aimed to pass the fighting word, and you figured on going after your gun a split second before the words were all out of your mouth. And that's exactly what you did. You went after your gun before the fighting word came out! That's your idea of a fair fight, I suppose, and maybe that's the reason you've been winning all the time.

"But I had you pegged, my friend, so I took a little advantage of your feeble wit! By rights I ought to have plugged you between the eyes, but I figured that you wasn't quite competent to take care of yourself, so I just busted your elbow. Anyhow, with a stiff elbow joint you'll never draw another gun with that hand, and you're too old to ever learn how to handle your left, so I figure that you'll be plumb docile and peaceable from now on!"

And the Kid was right about it, for Red Bill's elbow joint presently healed as stiff as a gun barrel, and that made a pretty good Injun out of him.

CRICKET

A Complete Novelette

by T. S. Stribling

Author of "Fombombo," "The Refugees," etc.

UNFORTUNATELY Professor Henry Poggioli, American psychologist and unprofessional investigator of crimes, did not observe the precise minute or from exactly what direction the gentleman with the drooping blond mustache came out on the piazza of Bay Mansion Hotel in Bridgetown, Barbados. Either of these data would have been of incalculable assistance later to Mr. Poggioli in his investigation of the mysterious murder or suicide of Oswald Hemmingway. Because if the gentleman came out of the hotel itself, that meant one thing; if he had hurried from the cricket ground along Beckles Road and had entered Bay Mansion grounds by the postern gate, that meant quite another. But when, or whence he came lay completely outside the American's mental record, unless indeed, one included his subconscious which is supposed to keep a sleepless tab on every nervous impulse of the whole sensorium; but that, of course, lay quite outside the practical politics of Poggioli's usable, everyday experience.

As a matter of fact the psychologist sat brooding over a depressing, highly colored tragedy which he had just witnessed in Haiti, and in which he had taken a minor, but painful rôle.

He was aroused from this melancholy reverie by a peculiarly ingratiating odor. His thoughts slowly returned to the present, bringing an impression that some woman had come out on the veranda, possessed of some new and delicate incense which she was burning, probably for the midges. He looked up and saw the gentleman with the blond mustache leaning over, elbows on knees, nursing a cigar in his forefingers while he upheld his chin with his thumbs. The fellow stared fixedly through the grove of mango trees which shaded the hotel grounds, evidently facing a keen self-reproach on some count or other.

At that moment Poggioli's thoughts were diverted by the crowd from the cricket game beginning to flow back down Beckles Road into Bay Street. Some lined themselves up in the shade of the mangoes to await the mule tram car which serves Bridgetown; others with inveterate English pedestrianism started walking on down town through the glaring white dust of the thoroughfare. Over the crowd hung a tense shocked atmosphere which held quite different spiritual overtones from the usual English reserve after a cricket game. Just then three cricketeers in the uniform of the Wanderers' Club came trotting with grim faces down Beckles Road to the corner of Bay Street. They stopped, stared down the brilliant thoroughfare, and such was the silence that Poggioli heard one of them say to his companions—

"Yonder come the bobbies now."

A second player answered—

"Do you think Cap McGabe did it?"

"Makes no difference whether he did or not, we can't have a story like this coming out about our club."

Poggioli turned to his companion on the porch because he had an impression that the fellow had just come from the game and knew all about what the players were discussing.

"What's happened at the match?" he asked sharply.

The man with the blond mustache turned and apparently observed Poggioli for the first time.

"Seems to have been an accident of some kind."

The fellow's pronunciation was not the broad gargling Barbadan, but was crisper; English, undoubtedly, possibly a native of Kent.

"Weren't you there?"

The gentleman pulled at his mustache, which was yellow in the center from tobacco smoke.

"No, I wasn't there."

The American was vaguely surprized at the answer.

"I had an impression you were."

"No."

Here a police detachment came hurrying up Bay Street and around the corner. At the same time two or three of the guests of the hotel entered the postern gate off Beckles Road. They got to the piazza at rather a brisker pace than the climate commended. As they passed Poggioli, he asked the group in general what had occurred at the cricket game. A younger man paused just before entering the hotel door.

"Chap named Hemmingway bumped off at the bath house."

"Murdered?" asked the American sharply.

"Don't know whether he did it himself or somebody did it for him. I'm cutting away because I don't like to be around when the police begin taking names—dragging you to court—besides I don't know a thing about it. If I did it would be different." And the youngish gentleman passed inside leaving Poggioli and his companion to assimilate this startling information.

THIS new tragedy coming on top of the American's somber reflections gave the psychologist a thrill of dismay. He got up from his seat nervously, and in default of any other listener addressed the blond gentleman.

"I'd give a month's salary not to have been on this island when this occurred."

The man with the mustache came out of his meditation to look curiously at Poggioli.

"How can it affect a completely detached American like you?"

"Somehow or other I'll be dragged into this investigation."

"Why?"

"Because I am a psychologist. People seem to think I can unravel crimes."

"Can you?"

"Why no—that is, no more than any other layman with a somewhat analytical mind."

The gentleman with the blond mustache pondered a moment, then asked with that sharp upward tilt with which the English twirl the end of their questions:

"May I inquire if your name happens to be Poggioli?"

"Yes, I'm he. I don't believe I recall—"

"No, you don't. Cheswick is my name. I saw a notice of your arrival in the Bridgetown *Times* day before yesterday. They tooted you up pretty stiff, human sleuth, a kind of A. Conan Doyle hero."

The gentleman's pale, inscrutable blue eyes rested on Poggioli with some curiosity, and perhaps some amusement.

"Yes, I saw that. The captain of the ship gave the reporter all that stuff," explained Poggioli defensively.

"Perhaps you gave some of it to the captain?" another sharp upward twirl.

Poggioli thought he caught in this a certain flavor of impudence.

"I was not talking for publication."

A pause. The blond gentleman removed his cigar, saw it was out and as he made preparations to relight it, continued—

"Don't you like to—er—exert your talents?"

"Well—no, I don't," admitted Poggioli.

"You don't enjoy—what is it—analysis?"

"I like theoretic analysis," delimited the American. "I enjoy an abstract problem. If some one would bring me all the data and say, 'Here it is, what happened?' I'd like such a problem, but when human lives depend upon your efforts, very often brilliant men, your friends, and then see them—"

"Hanged?" inquired the gentleman in an odd tone.

"No, trapped and murdered," stated Poggioli hotly, thinking of his Haitian adventure. "I tell you, the detection of crime is a —— occupation. A man who follows it will become a monster. I, for one, will never again engage in the trade or sport of man-hunting. That's why I say I wish I had never come to this island."

"You feel keenly on the point," observed the blond gentleman philosophically. "Well, eschew this vile trade, Mr. Poggioli, shake its dust from your skirts. Certainly you are under no moral or legal obligation to turn into—what did the paper call you, a human sleuth?"

"That's exactly what I am going to do."

At this moment the crowd in Bay Street were somewhat disturbed by a ragged woman pushing her way toward the hotel gate; a little later she hurried up the graveled path under the mangoes. She was half sobbing as she came, and was one of the most wretched looking creatures Poggioli had ever seen. She was thin; her clothes were filthy and hung upon her in rags; her hair disheveled and dirty. She came unsteadily up the path, as if struck by the tropic sun. As she approached the piazza she looked miserably at the two men on the veranda.

"Masters," she said in a shaken whine, "may I be so bold as to ask if either of you kind gentlemen could tell me where I can find Mr. Poggioli."

Cheswick made a gesture with his cigar.

"That's Mr. Poggioli."

"Master," wailed the woman turning to the American. "I was advised to come to you. They said if ever a gentleman could work a poor boy out of a bad case, it would be you. I haven't any money, Master, but I'll give you an order for my wages at the sugar mills."

"Madam," interposed Poggioli, rather at sea amid these wailing complaints, "may I ask who you are?"

"I'm the Widow McGabe."

"What do you want, Mrs. McGabe?"

"I want you to loose my son, Cap, from the bobbies. You know he didn't kill young Oswald Hemmingway, my master. Why should he? Certainly it is reported he treated my daughter illy. But is that enough for my boy to murder him? He was always a gentle lad, for all his strength and activity. I told him when he got on the team with the gentlemen, 'Son,' says I, 'this will bring ye bad luck, a boy the likes of you playing cricket with the gentlemen.' But he says, 'They pay me, I am a professional.' But I says, 'It's not according to nature, the son of a red-leg on a team with the heir of Sir Alexander Hemmingway, some bad luck—' "

Here the old hag's interminable, weeping monolog was interrupted by three negro policemen, wearing the queer, girlish sailor hats and white blouses of the Barbadan police, who came out of Beckles Road with a wiry youth among them.

Mrs. McGabe burst into a passionate, almost grotesque grief.

"There he goes, my poor boy Cap, on his way to the gallows for defending the honor of his sister, though he didn't do it a-tall, more likely he killed hisself, as some say. But master if you'll look into it; just step and see who it was, if you please, and tell the Bobbies who to arrest. They read about you in the *Times* and sent me to you—"

The woman had turned and was staring after the black policemen as they moved down the dusty road with the cricket player in their midst. When they passed out of sight, Mrs. McGabe slumped down on the hotel step in a sort of syncope of grief.

Mr. Cheswick continued sitting impassively stroking his blond down-curved mustache with the yellow stains in the center. In an interval in the woman's noises he glanced at the American and said with a certain faint satire, or perhaps a faint brutality in his voice—

"Mr. Poggioli, your premonition was justified. Publicity did it. Unless a modern *Sherlock Holmes* wants to go on with his —what do you call it—monstrous trade of man-hunting, he really oughtn't to advertise himself in the papers."

Poggioli disregarded Mr. Cheswick's observation, and began a sort of explanatory argument with the woman that he could be of no assistance to her son.

"I'm not a lawyer, Mrs. McGabe. If your son really committed this rash act—"

"But is it reasonable, master, that poor Cap would strike down a gentleman who played cricket with him?"

"You suggested it yourself."

"That was by way of telling you what I heard them say!"

"What you need is a good lawyer—"

Mr. Cheswick interrupted to growl at the woman—

"Be off with you! Go to Holt and Logan, solicitors, on Cheapside, they'll take the order for your wages."

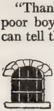
The hag looked hopelessly at Cheswick, then back at Poggioli, then took herself off with the air of one who has suffered unending misfortune and poverty.

Her manner somehow touched Poggioli; perhaps Cheswick's harshness had something to do with it. At any rate he hesitated, then followed Mrs. McGabe out into the road. Not until she turned to latch the gate did she see him, then she gasped out:

"Oh master, will you help me?"

"I'll go down and listen to the preliminary investigation," said Poggioli, moved again in spite of himself. "I'm afraid I can't be of much service to you."

"Thank ye, master, when you look at my poor boy you'll see he didn't do it. You can tell the judges who did."



THE two fell in with the crowd which flowed down Bay Street in the wake of the black policemen and their prisoner, the hag looking at Poggioli with a beatific expression through her tears, as if a saint had come down to help her in her trouble.

The walk was disagreeable enough. Hot white dust was over their shoes and swirled up in the air with the tramp of the cricket crowd. The high walls beside the road cut off the trade wind which swayed the treetops overhead. The whole thoroughfare was a long breathless solarium.

As the two hurried along, gradually gaining on the main body of pedestrians, Poggioli mopped his face, rather vexed at himself for being led by sympathy into this investigation. The affair promised no complication whatever. An ordinary criminal had committed an ordinary crime. There was nothing in it calling for those delicate and subtle inductions which entertained and moved Poggioli.

In the midst of these reflections the hag at his side gasped:

"Yonder they are, master, starting across the bridge!"

The American looked where the harbor of Bridgetown narrows into an inner harbor called the "Carenage." Across this a long pontoon bridge baked in the sunshine. The Carenage was a forest of masts, jammed with schooners and small freighters loading molasses, sugar and cotton. The vessels were so thick, a man could have walked from one shore to the other by stepping from deck to deck.

As Poggioli watched the negro policemen take their prisoner across the bridge, he grew more and more averse to becoming mixed up in the vulgarity of the case. He walked a little more slowly, casting about in his mind for some words with which to end, politely, his relations with this woman. At that moment, Mrs. McGabe suddenly stared and gasped.

"La, there he goes!"

Poggioli looked around just in time to see the cricket player jerk loose from the negroes, seize the handrail of the bridge and make a headlong dive over it.

All three policemen grabbed at him, but he tore out of their hands and fell, apparently, on to the decks of the crowded vessels. However, as the police remained staring emptily downward, he must have fallen between decks into the murky water of the Carenage. A shout of excitement went up from the crowd. Everybody rushed to the rail to stare. A shock went through Poggioli. He turned to the woman.

"My ——, he's drowned himself!"

Mrs. McGabe's face was brightened with a crude joy.

"Drowned hisse'f!" she exulted. "He's got away!"

"Escaped!"

"Sure he has, master, a lad's gone for good when he gets under the boats in the Carenage!"

Poggioli looked blankly at this novel asylum for escaped prisoners.

"When can he get out?"

"Oh, the bobbies will keep him hiding in the water for two or three days, maybe a week. But one of these dark nights he'll slip out. I thank you very much, master, for what you've done. You've a kind heart, but I won't need you no more unless the bobbies ketch him agin."

She bobbed a queer awkward curtsy, then deserted Poggioli and the next instant ran to the rail herself shouting—

"Keep hid, Cap! There's a bobbie on the

fourth scow from the bank. Cut away, Laddie!"

The tragedy of the murder was lost in this queer, rather farcical escape. Everybody was laughing now. Poggioli himself was relieved at his sudden deliverance from a stupid undertaking.

Then the fact that he had dreaded this very simple problem struck the psychologist as an odd reaction, and as he stood peering into the Carenage he began an introspective analysis to know exactly why he had been so averse to aiding a poor wretch of a woman whose son was in jeopardy. Presently, he discovered the reason. The problem held no possibility of a *tour de force* of induction. The Bridgetown paper had acclaimed him as a wizard, but chance had flung him a dull, commonplace crime which no amount of talent could twist into something dramatic and startling. That was what had repelled him. He had wanted to perform in a theatrical rôle before Bridgetown. What had delayed his steps at Mrs. McGabe's side was his vanity.

When Poggioli realized this he was amazed and disgusted with himself.

"What a cad I am!" he thought.

But back of his self-contempt persisted this feeling of relief that he had not been forced to appear before the Barbadan public with a dull performance.

IN THE midst of this curious and unflattering analysis, a somewhat sardonic voice called out: "There he is, Sir Alexander. That's Mr. Poggioli, the American gentleman who has attracted such favorable comment in the papers."

Poggioli turned and saw, what was very uncommon in Bridgetown, a big English automobile which had whispered up behind him. It was a brougham. On the driver's seat sat a negro chauffeur in livery. The front seat was unoccupied; in the rear sat Mr. Cheswick and a thin, elderly man, with iron-gray hair and the finely graved face of an aristocrat. This gentleman now wore the pale, strained look which accompanies a sharp and sudden grief. Mr. Cheswick stepped out of the car.

"Mr. Poggioli," he began ceremoniously, "may I introduce Sir Alexander Hemmingway?" Whether Cheswick reversed the natural order of the introduction out of confusion or ignorance or sarcasm, Poggioli could not be sure. "Sir Alexander drove to the hotel inquiring for you. I told him you had just walked down Bay Street, and he brought me along to point out such a celebrity."

Such ill-timed sarcasm before the grief-stricken father irritated Poggioli. He offered his hand to the peer.

"I will be too happy to serve you in any way I can, Sir Alexander," he said.

"And I'm glad to find you, Mr. Poggioli," replied the baronet in a moved tone. "You have landed in Bridgetown at a most opportune moment for us. I think you were sent here providentially to assist me and—er—my business associates in this hour of necessity."

"Your business associates," repeated the psychologist curiously.

"Yes, my associates." Here Sir Alexander turned to Cheswick with a "I thank you very much my man," at the same time drawing Poggioli into the rear seat with him.

Cheswick stood back and growled out something as the motor murmured forward across the bridge into Trafalgar Square.

"I assume," began the baronet, looking at Poggioli with his grief drawn face, "that you are a man of discretion, Mr. Poggioli—"

"Any confidences you care to make will naturally be guarded, Sir Alexander."

"Thank you. Then I will tell you point blank that I and the directors of the Imperial Bank of Barbados desire you to prove this young fellow, Cap McGabe, is the—" his thin face became more bloodless—"the murderer of my son, Oswald Hemmingway."

"That will require no effort, Sir Alexander. The fellow has practically confessed his crime. He's out there in the Carenage now somewhere under the vessels."

The baronet looked back at the waterfront, startled.

"He is!"

"Yes, I saw him break away from the police and leap over the handrail."

A look of extraordinary relief came into the banker's face.

"That—that's helpful, that's very good!"

Poggioli could see no cause for gratitude in this and sat looking at the gentleman curiously.

After a moment the baronet continued—

"That will change somewhat the task we would like for you to perform, Mr. Poggioli."

"Naturally, you would like to have me assist in his recapture."

"No-o," said the baronet slowly, "we would now like for you to assist this McGabe in escaping from the Carenage and leaving Barbados permanently."

"You want me to help him escape!" echoed Poggioli in a lowered but amazed voice.

"Yes, we want him out of the island."

Poggioli could not believe he had heard correctly.

"You want me to assist the murderer of your son in evading the police and flying from justice!"

The baronet shook his head.

"McGabe is not the murderer of my son."

"Then who is?"

"I think—I have only too good reasons to believe that he died of his own hand, Mr. Poggioli."

The American stared at his companion.

"Didn't you just ask me to assist in proving that McGabe had assassinated your son?"

"That was before I knew he had escaped. His flight is an admission of guilt. Now I ask you to help him get away so he may never come to trial."

Poggioli was on the verge of crying, "But I don't understand," when a certain ray of comprehension filtered into the enigma—the baronet's son was a suicide. Sir Alexander did not want the details of his death made public in a criminal trial.

The banker who was watching the American's face sighed heavily.

"I see you suspect the truth."

"Something about the bank?" insinuated Poggioli in a low voice.

"You have peculation in your mind," prompted the baronet.

"I can only surmise something of the sort."

"Well, we are not certain yet. We have already found out he has been plunging heavily on the New York stock exchange. My clerk, Hodges, got it from a friend of his at the cable office. He telephoned me at the Wanderers. He heard of Oswald's death sooner than I did. The manager telephoned to the bank at once, and then Hodges asked for me."

"Do you know how much he lost?"

"No, we are on our way now to the cable office for a record of his transactions."

"You think he used the bank's money in his speculations?"

Sir Alexander made a heavy gesture.

"My son had no private fortune of his own."

The car murmured on through Trafalgar Square with its monument to Nelson, its cab stands, its venders squatting around the boles of enormous tropical trees. It pursued its way up Broad Street where the smartest shops in Bridgetown possess dingy windows crisscrossed with iron bars so that they display nothing whatever. As Poggioli stared at these dull respectable shops, a thought struck him.

"Sir Alexander, doesn't it strike you as incongruous for your son to commit suicide just after winning a cricket game? It is very unnatural that he should have picked a moment filled with the elation of victory for such an act."

The baronet made a hopeless gesture.

"I had thought of that. I am sure he delayed this madness merely to assist his team mates in the hardest contest of the season. When it was over and won, then—" Sir Alexander made another movement of his hand—"to have done less would not have been cricket."

ON THE way to the cable office the brougham stopped at the Imperial Bank and picked up Hodges. As the fellow came out into the street and entered the car, the baronet inquired anxiously—

"Have you found out anything so far, Hodges?"

The clerk hesitated.

"Nothing definite, sir."

The baronet shook his head.

"That tells me you are on track of a shortage—it will be definite soon enough."

"We can only hope it won't, Sir Alexander," said the clerk in a low voice.

The banker did not press his man any further, but leaned back against the cushions and closed his eyes as if in pain. Hodges was a sandy-colored man, with the reddish looking eyes of his type. He stared woodenly ahead of him out of respect for the baronet, and tried to touch Poggioli by whom he sat as slightly as possible. The American himself began planning some method to get Cap McGabe out of the island. The ethics of shouldering a murder off on an innocent man crossed his mind.

He leaned and murmured this observation to Hodges. The clerk looked around with a certain surprize in his pinkish eyes.

"It would be best for him to go, sir," whispered Hodges. "He'd have to stand his trial which would be expensive. Then we don't *know* Mr. Oswald killed hisself. Cap might have done it after all. Then we can't have anything come out that would shake confidence in the bank, sir. Somebody's got to bear it."

This reply, with its implications spreading in every direction from sheer equivocation to the basic concern for the general practical welfare of Bridgetown, Hodges whispered off without a pause for reflection. The patness of it amazed the psychologist. It was less a studied reply than a racial reflex. It struck Poggioli as the most English attitude imaginable. He had a feeling that any Englishman would have said the same thing, phrased according to the culture of the speaker. Through Hodges, the British empire had whispered the answer in Poggioli's ear.

The brougham drew up silently before the cable office, and the three men passed into the heavy, stone building. Hodges knew the clerk in the office, a Mr. Dwight, and explained the situation in a few words. Dwight, a dark little man with perhaps a Welsh strain in him, went quickly to the files, thumbed through the recent dispatches with clerkly fingers and presently brought out the orders which Oswald Hemmingway had cabled to the brokerage firm of Johnson & Company in New York. He spread the file on a desk before Hodges and Poggioli.

The American glanced briefly at the yellow sheets which told the story of Oswald Hemmingway's downfall with telegraphic brevity. It was a series of orders to buy and sell different stocks. Hodges had brought some ledger paper and began making a digest of his friend's operations.

Sir Alexander who found this systematic accounting of his dead son's misfeasance too painful to endure, now said in a strained voice—

"I'll go back. Show me later what you find, Hodges."

Poggioli noticed the baronet's white face.

"Shall I bring you a glass of water?" he asked in alarm.

"No, I'm very well, thank you," and he walked unsteadily back to his motor.

The psychologist sat down again and returned his thoughts to the cablegrams. Again he realized he had before him an inadequate problem for the proper exertion of his talents. This was an ordinary case of embezzlement for the ancient reason. He began questioning Hodges in a low tone, not because he expected any development, but out of intellectual habit, as a hunter walks through a field kicking at coverts which he knows are empty.

"Did you know Mr. Hemmingway dabbled in stocks?"

"No, sir, I didn't know that he *dabbled* in stocks." Hodges' stress on the word invited further questioning.

"You knew he was inclined that way?"

"Well," said Hodges staying his pen from an entry. "All us young fellows in the street, sir, follow the stock reports. We say to each other at the club, 'Reading jumped five points' or in a big flurry, such as we've just had, 'Amalgamated hopped thirty-nine in two hours.' And none of us can help thinking, 'Five thousand pounds in this or that would have made us rich men.' It's a queer thing, sir, to see fortunes, motor cars, villas, wives and even private yachts, swing so easy back and forth in the stock reports, when a lucky shot of say five thousand pounds would bring 'em down; and us penned up there in the hot office handling fifty times that amount every day and getting twenty bob a week for it." Hodges blinked his pinkish eyes as if troubled by some passing mote, then resumed his steady regard of the American. "Of course, we wouldn't like you to mention such things outside. We bank employees aren't supposed to think of such things, sir. We can't have anything like that going on in our heads, sir, even if it does."

"Why no, certainly not," agreed Poggioli gravely.

At this point, Dwight, the cable operator, who had been casting glances at the two men now came around the counter to their table in the solicitous fashion of an underling whose curiosity is aroused.

"If there is anything further I can do for you gentlemen," he suggested in the lowered tone one uses in the presence of a tragedy.

"Thanks," mumbled Hodges without looking up.

"Quite a shock, Mr. Poggioli," pursued the cable dispatcher in vague sympathy, then he added, "I haven't been introduced to you, Mr. Poggioli, but I knew it was you. I knew Sir Alexander would have the finest talent he could get on a mystery like this."

"I'm afraid the mystery is not very deep," said the psychologist.

"Well—it does look simple," agreed the clerk, falling instantly in line with expert opinion, then after a moment he added diffidently, "still, it has its points."

"What are those?" inquired Poggioli more out of curiosity than anything else.

"We-ell—" Mr. Dwight scratched his sleek black head in an effort to crystallize his general feeling for the mystery he thought should lie behind such a tragedy—"Mr. Oswald never did come here to the office and sign his own cablegrams; he always telephoned 'em in."

Poggioli nodded slightly.

"That was against our rules really," frowned Mr. Dwight, "you aren't supposed to telephone your messages, you're supposed to bring 'em in yourself and sign 'em yourself."

"Why did you permit Hemmingway to break the rules?"

"We were good friends. Then I knew it wouldn't do for a bank cashier to be seen too often around the cable office. A man in his position has got to keep up appearances. It's a duty he owes his bank."

Poggioli nodded.

"And then he paid me in an odd way," pursued Mr. Dwight hopefully.

"How, send you a check?"

"Oh no, sir," cried Mr. Dwight. "He wouldn't have checks coming to the bank from the cable company. That would have led to questions at once. No, he just mailed me a five-pound note with nothing else in the envelope, just the note, and phoned me what was coming. 'Let me know when it's used up, Dwight' he said, 'and another's coming.' But he never did use his first remittance quite up. I've got it in my desk in an envelope. Show it to you."

Mr. Dwight hurried around behind his counter moved by that human eagerness to exhibit any relic of a tragedy and thus help reconstruct its impression. In half a minute he was back with the envelope which he handed to Poggioli.

The psychologist opened it and took out the five-pound note. He glanced at the pure white paper and flourishing black script. It was quite new. Apparently, it had never been folded except to place it in its present envelope. The only stain on it was a bluish smudge in the corner. It really corroborated the theory that Oswald had sent the money to the telegrapher, if so simple an act needed corroboration.

"Came straight out of the bank," observed the psychologist.

"What I don't understand," mused Dwight, scratching his head diffidently with the tip of one finger, "is how this spot came there." He pointed at it. "I—er—wondered what *you* would make of that?"

His faintly embarrassed stress on the "you" bespoke a layman presuming to make suggestions to a great criminal expert. Poggioli understood well enough the workings of the telegrapher's mind. Dwight expected every stain and streak to be filled with an intricate meaning, which Poggioli's subtlety would make clear. This was the clerk's reaction from reading the elaborately constructed fiction of the modern detective stories. The psychologist suppressed a smile.

"I daresay some fellow with dirty fingers owned this bill."

Dwight was crestfallen.

"Yes, sir, but—er—" then he continued with British persistence in his fanciful idea. "But you see, sir, that's its first folding. It was folded by Mr. Oswald, himself, a bank cashier. Now did you ever in your life know a bank cashier to have dirty fingers, sir? No, you never did, they don't have 'em, sir."

"That's a fact," agreed Poggioli good-humoredly.

HE WAS amused at the little telegrapher standing there so avid for a mystery to develop in his office. Fate had given him a glimpse of a great criminal expert, and Dwight wanted him to unravel then and there, for his amazement, out of a single stain, on a bank note, one of those complicated woofs of crime which had so often beguiled his leisure through the pages of his favorite shilling shocker.

He began again still more timidly—

"I have a magnifying glass, Mr. Poggioli—" when Hodges interrupted to say—

"Most extraordinary series of investments I ever heard of, Mr. Poggioli."

Mr. Dwight gave up his thrill with a cheated feeling and went slowly back around his counter to his work.

The American looked from the note to the sheet of figures Hodges had collated.

"What's odd about it?"

"Oswald Hemmingway had the most amazing run of bad luck you can imagine. If it had been reversed he would have been a millionaire today."

Poggioli leaned over the paper. Hodges continued:

"The poor boy made every buy exactly at the peak of prices, and every sell in the center of the trough. Now look at this. Compare the hourly prices on the stock exchange list with his cablegrams. Here, at one o'clock, Oswald sold International Oil at forty-seven; two hours later it was fifty-five, and an hour later fifty-six when he bought. He lost eleven points. Or take his deal in B. & Q. Ltd. He bought at nine o'clock at seventy-two. The hourly quotations read, 72-71-72-70-68-65, when he sold. The poor chap played a bull market right in the middle of a bear raid."

"Do all his buys and sells meet with the same sort of disaster?" asked Poggioli curiously.

"Every single one; he didn't make a penny in all his operations."

"How many sells and buys did he make?"

"Eighteen in three days."

"In a perfectly erratic market?"

"Yes, sir, the flurry in New York stock during the last two weeks; nobody really had it in hand, sir."

The American pondered and fished for his cigaret case, an action habitual with him when he started thinking.

"Hodges, that's an extraordinary sequence."

"That's what I was saying, sir."

"It is not only extraordinary, but I should say for sheer undirected fortuity, it is impossible, that is practically impossible."

"I don't see why you say it is impossible, sir; he did it, here it is."

"Mathematically impossible, I mean. It is just as unlikely to bet eighteen times and lose every time as it would be to bet eighteen times and win every time. That is the equivalent in roulette of red coming up eighteen times in succession."

"You can see for yourself," began Hodges tapping his sheet.

"I said *if* it were undirected. The probabilities of such a series of losses may be obtained roughly by multiplying two by itself for eighteen times. The chances are one in two hundred and sixty-two thousand that such a thing would not occur—if it were undirected."

Even Hodges began to grasp the implication by this time. He looked at the American.

"Blime me, but you are not saying Mr. Oswald meant to lose are you?"

Poggioli made no reply, but leaned over the table, studying the sheet.

"How much were his losses?"

"I figure up only five hundred pounds," puzzled Hodges. "But I suppose I must be wrong; that's too small an amount for Oswald Hemmingway to do a thing like that over."

"You mean approximately five hundred pounds?"

"No I mean five hundred pounds precisely, to a penny."

Poggioli shook his head, and made that gentle clicking sound with his tongue against his upper teeth which signifies pity, or gentle shame, or sympathy; indeed an oddly varied gamut of gentle emotions.

"I can hardly believe Oswald would do such a thing over a five-hundred-pound loss," repeated Hodges blankly.

"Odd, odd," agreed Poggioli. Then he added briskly, "Well, that's the information we came after. We might as well return to the bank."

"Right you are, sir."

Hodges folded his papers and stored them carefully in his pocket.

As they walked out Mr. Dwight followed them to the door. Even if his splotch on the bank note had been neglected, this last conversation about the probability of losses held a certain flavor of mystery. It would have been more to the point if Poggioli had used his magnifying glass on the note and had said, "The murderer of Oswald Hemmingway is a tall dark man with a club foot who has seen service in the Punjab," but what he had heard was something. Just then it occurred to Mr. Dwight that the Colonial banks of Barbados never imported English bank notes. They use a West Indian currency, struck especially for them. He went flying after Poggioli with this information.

The psychologist received it somewhat absently.

"But they do use regular English currency do they not?"

"Yes, but they don't import it, and this note was new, absolutely new except for the stain."

"Exactly."

"So it couldn't possibly have come out of the bank, sir."

"You are right."

"So there must be a very great mystery here after all, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Dwight excitedly.

Poggioli moved on away nodding his head at the clerk, but to be perfectly truthful he was occupied neither with this clew of the unusual currency nor his clew of mathematical probabilities. Both of these facts were stored away in appropriate mental niches to be used later, but just at this moment he was moved by a sort of dawning elation that there was something in the covert after all. He was going to have his game, an aristocratic melodrama of mental brilliancy to spread before the Barbadian public. The psychologist walked along the hot respectable street of Bridgetown with a light gay feeling; and this gaiety, he realized, was based on his vanity. He smiled at himself and murmured audibly—

"What a cad I am!"

"Pardon?" ejaculated Hodges looking around at him interrogatively.

"I said," repeated Poggioli still smiling, "there is no such thing as art for art's sake; that saying is a sham and a humbug; art is for approbation's sake, to show people how wonderful we are."

Mr. Hodges closed one pinkish eye insinuatingly.

"Right you are, sir. It's not every clerk could have done as I did, sir—tipped off a great detective with a clew—eh?"

Hodges's thoughts evidently were running along the same lines as Poggioli's, only with more naïvete.

$ HAD the Imperial Bank of Barbados been located in London or New York, its furnishings would have been described by the simple word "marble," but in the dusty sunstruck port of Bridgetown the only adjective which could properly qualify the Imperial's grandeur is the pollysyllable marmoreal. For the force of adjectives, like gravitation, the speed of light and the beauty of women, is relative.

The marmoreal interior of the Bank of Barbados, when Poggioli entered it was in a state of extreme disturbance. This too, was relative. In New York any patron would have said the bank was functioning with oiled precision. The queues of depositors and withdrawers were approaching their respective windows. A floorman piloted the uninitiated to the windows tagged with their initials. But, for example, the teller in Window K-L, instead of being posted exactly in the center of his cage, had dislodged himself through some emotional stress, and now stood some six inches to one side and twelve inches to the rear, so that he could peer back into the marmoreal interior of the bank for any new symptoms of the investigation going on therein. The floorman himself, in stout respectable uniform, so far forgot himself as to glance backward, or to peer around his convoy in an effort to see who was entering the door. Now that would have been efficiency in New York, but in ultra-English Bridgetown, it was chaos. In short the morale of the Imperial Bank of Bridgetown was shot to pieces.

When Poggioli entered, the floorman actually deserted a client, and hurried to the psychologist.

"They're waiting for you in the directors' room, Sir," he whispered huskily. "Mr. Hodges will show you in. You're to come at once, Sir."

The fellow somehow gave Poggioli the impression that he had once been a cabman but had had reverses.

A FEW moments later Hodges bowed Poggioli into a room, entered himself, placed his sheets of paper on a table before the baronet and retired.

Sir Alexander arose and formally drew up a seat for his guest, then picked up his clerk's report with unsteady fingers. After a single glance he lowered the sheet with a long expiration and a shake of his head.

"This settles the matter, Mr. Poggioli, the clerks have found a shortage in my son's accounts, five hundred pounds. His losses set out in this sheet balance exactly with the shortage."

"That's an extremely small sum to produce so violent a reaction in a young man of your son's position, Sir Alexander."

"I had thought of that. It was not the amount, Mr. Poggioli. He knew my strong sentiment against stock gambling. His remorse had much to do with it."

"But wasn't it several days between his losses and his death?"

"Four days."

"Remorse is a cyclical emotion, Sir Alexander. Within four days a normal man of your son's age would have dropped his self-destructive impulse.

"He was a young man of great determination."

"Nevertheless, depression and recuperation lie back of determination and control it."

"I can't see where your speculations are leading, Mr. Poggioli, my son—is dead."

The American who was more nearly thinking aloud at this point than conducting a conversation turned to the practical end of the problem.

"The shortage you speak of, was it difficult to trace?"

"No, very simple."

"Your son had made no elaborate effort to cover it up?"

"None at all. He had simply made out his ticket for cash withdrawn."

"For five hundred pounds."

"Yes."

"What was the date of the ticket?"

The banker replaced his glasses on his high thin nose, picked up his memorandum.

"April the eleventh."

"And the stock transactions took place on April thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth?"

"Yes, he evidently withdrew the money with the intention of speculating."

"Doesn't it strike you as extraordinary that he should foretell to a penny the amount he would lose in his gambling?"

The baronet removed his glasses and drew a dry hand across his eyes.

"He evidently deposited this with his broker in New York and drew against it until it was gone."

"That's impossible," pointed out the American, "because money in bulk can not reach America in four days from Barbados, and it has not been cabled to New York."

Sir Alexander, his wits dulled by grief, was still evidently unaware of whither the psychologist's argument tended.

"Did your son have a financial rating in Dun or Bradstreet?"

"Yes."

"Then the natural course for him to have pursued would have been to gamble first and draw on the bank for his losses afterward. To my mind it's against all law of behavior for a man to draw out five hundred pounds and then apparently speculate with the greatest care to lose precisely that amount."

The banker looked his astonishment.

"Mr. Poggioli, I am accepting you as an expert in your profession. But frankly, I do not understand why you suggest my son intended to lose five hundred pounds."

"I do not believe your son did it."

"I gathered that much. But why do you think any one speculated carefully to lose five hundred pounds?"

"Because the reports there before you show that unless these losses were intentional three almost impossible coincidences occurred simultaneously; a stock gambler who lost on every speculation for eighteen times in succession; the second coincidence is that these losses should total up precisely with an amount of money already predetermined; the third is, after these two impossible events had coincided, then your son's emotional recuperative cycle should not have functioned within the space of four days. When three improbabilities pile upon each other like that, Sir Alexander, I decline to believe any of them."

"Then what do you believe?" cried the baronet, his voice edged with excitement.

"I think the person who manipulated these carefully planned losses had some powerful motive for losing. It looks as if it were arranged purely to give the color of suicide to your son's death."

"Then you think he was murdered after all?" asked the peer in a low tone, his face growing even paler than it was.

"This theory is further upheld by the fact that the trading orders were not placed in the cable office by your son in person, they were telephoned in against the rules of the company."

The banker stared at the psychologist.

"Then who did it?" he gasped.

"I can't say."

AT THIS moment came a tap on the door and Hodges entered.

"Some gentlemen of the cricket club to see you, sir."

"Let them come in Hodges; will you wait here, Mr. Poggioli, and see what these gentlemen have to say?"

The psychologist made a gesture of assent, and a moment later four men entered the door.

As they came forward, Poggioli was surprized to see Mr. Cheswick among them. Cheswick performed the introductions. The other three men were Messrs. Jones, Wilberforce and Santee. They were of different types, but all three held the sunburnt, outdoor quality of cricket players. When the baronet asked what he could do for them, the youth named Jones made a little bow and began what evidently was a prepared address.

"Sir Alexander, we are a committee from the Wanderers Cricket Club to which your son Oswald belonged. We have come to see you, sir, on a mission of a very intimate nature. We have come to make a request of you, which will call upon you for a—we can only say, sir—a very great generosity, a far more than usual generosity."

The baronet looked at the four men lined stiffly before him.

"May I hear the nature of your request, gentlemen?"

"We would like if possible, sir, to keep the name of the Wanderers Club out of the tragedy which has just occurred, Sir Alexander." Here Jones caught his breath apparently at his own effrontery, then hurried on. "The Wanderers Club is a very old institution, sir. Our charter dates back to 1712 when the Prince of Wales visited our island on the frigate *Indomitable*. His Highness was gracious enough to make us an address at the founding of our club."

"Yes," said the baronet in a bleak voice, "I am acquainted with those facts."

"Since that time," went on Mr. Jones, "no legal action has ever originated in the Wanderers Club. No doubt within the space of two hundred years there have been provocations, Sir Alexander, but up until now everything has been arranged without publicity. We have always been a club of gentlemen, sir, devoted to the sport of cricket."

Mr. Jones ceased speaking. The baronet drew a deep sigh and for several moments sat looking at the men before him.

"What course of action have you to suggest, gentleman?" he asked at length.

"We await your decision entirely, Sir Alexander, the whole resources of the club, both physical and moral, are at your disposal."

"I don't doubt your good will, but I can't see any possible use I can make of your offer."

Mr. Jones took a step nearer and lowered his voice.

"We had thought of two possible courses of action, Sir Alexander."

"Mention them."

The cricket player glanced significantly at Poggioli.

"He is my confidential adviser in this matter," said the baronet.

"Very well, sir. Our first hope is that you will permit us simply to expel the criminal from Barbados and never permit him to return."

"Could the club do that?"

"We will take it upon ourselves, sir."

The baronet pondered a moment.

"And the other alternative?"

Jones hesitated again.

"Two of our members meant to accompany the miscreant from Barbados and see to it that he is settled away from here. At a pinch, sir—" here the speaker's voice went lower still, "at a pinch, he would never arrive at his destination—another case of suicide—"

Sir Alexander made a gesture of repulsion.

"That is unthinkable."

"We felt so, too," echoed Jones in relief.

"However, I would like to know that the assassin of my son is no longer in Barbados."

"That is very, very generous, sir," thanked Jones evidently moved, and the other three echoed, "Very generous. We will answer for his permanent removal from the island."

"I—I think if—if Oswald were alive—" the baronet ceased speaking to control the emotion which threatened his composure.

The four Wanderers nodded slightly to signify that they too believed the dead youth, if he were alive would approve this course.

The baronet regained his self-possession and suggested in a gray voice—

"You will have to spirit him out from under the surveillance of the police."

"That will be done, sir."

"I would suggest that you work with Mr. Poggioli, here. He represents my interest in the matter."

"We will be proud to cooperate with such a distinguished criminologist," assured Jones.

"Then I will leave the details of the matter in your hands," the baronet leaned back in his chair with a deep sigh, perhaps from the strain such a concession made upon his charity.

As Poggioli followed the men out, he glanced back at his employer with a feeling that here indeed was a gentleman of peculiar worth and dignity.

THE committee and Poggioli retired to one of the waiting rooms in the bank to work out the details of their plan to banish Oswald Hemmingway's assassin. As they seated themselves around a small table, Poggioli turned curiously to Cheswick.

"I didn't know you were a member of the Wanderers?"

"I am not," explained Mr. Cheswick at once. "I was at the club talking this matter over with Mr. Jones. He was regretting the unfortunate publicity of the matter, the first in the history of the club, and I suggested some arrangement like this might be made with Sir Alexander; he's a very fine gentleman."

"You suggested it!"

Poggioli was faintly surprized at the idea originating outside the club members.

"Yes, I had heard of some such arrangements being made in other places. I even suggested that I might escort the criminal to some designated port, as I am leaving this island in a few days. However," he added, glancing around the group, "I would not be responsible for his remaining there."

Here Jones, Wilberforce and Mr. Santee agreed at once that this would be beyond his rôle.

"Then the only thing left for us to do," proceeded Mr. Cheswick, stroking his yellow mustache, "is to arrange the details of McGabe's deportation."

This was the first time McGabe's name had been mentioned openly at the meeting.

"What sort of fellow is this McGabe?" queried the psychologist.

"He is what is called here in Barbados a 'red leg,' " replied Jones. "The 'red legs' are descendants of white criminals who were banished from England to Barbados back in the seventeenth century. They were sold as slaves to the gentlemen colonists of the island. They were called 'red legs' because their owners clothed them in kilts and their legs sunburned."

Poggioli nodded slowly.

"I see, criminality is inherited in the McGabe family. The grandfather was banished to Barbados, the grandson is banished from Barbados."

There was a moment's silence at this stark unrolling of destiny.

"It's enough to make a man sorry for the rotter," ejaculated Santee.

The American sat meditating if it were possible for Cap McGabe to have sent the fraudulent cable orders.

"Is this young fellow well educated?" he inquired.

"I doubt if he knows his three 'R's'," said Santee. "He is in our club as a professional."

"I see he is one of those shrewd untutored fellows—"

Santee looked at Jones.

"He never impressed me that way, did he you, Jones?"

"Not at all," agreed Jones. "He was just a wiry lad with a batting eye. Why did you think he might be clever, Mr. Poggioli?"

"Perhaps Mr. Poggioli has already discovered something we don't know?" suggested Cheswick, looking keenly at the psychologist.

"Oh no," hastened Poggioli. "I am simply groping after McGabe's character. His escape from the police in the Carenage struck me as a *tour de force*."

"It was not original," smiled Jones, "that's been done several times."

"It seems to me," interposed Cheswick, "that we are more interested in the question: Will McGabe resist our effort to deport him? However, I am not criticizing any question asked by an expert."

"He probably wouldn't resist if he were approached right," said Jones.

"If it's a matter of diplomacy you'd be a good man to approach him," suggested Poggioli.

"I don't want to go by myself," retreated Jones at once.

"Cheswick and Wilberforce could go along since they are to accompany him from the island," planned Santee.

"How are you going to arrange about his passport?" inquired Cheswick.

"How are you going to find him at all?" added Santee.

"And him under the surveillance of the police?" concluded Wilberforce.

Poggioli saw that the committee expected him as an expert to answer these questions.

"I hope some of these details will work themselves out as we get into the problem," answered the psychologist.

"One thing's sure," interposed Jones, "all of us men can't go down to the harbor and interview McGabe, that would be too conspicuous. I think Mr. Poggioli is the man."

"Hear! Hear!" agreed Mr. Santee, nodding his head decisively.

"Certainly," agreed Cheswick with a slight drawl and a pull at his yellowed mustache, "there is no use in us laymen intruding on the almost uncanny powers of a master mind—did you gentlemen read the notice with which the *Times* honored Mr. Poggioli?"

"That very fact," agreed Jones simply, "will give him the entrée with the harbor police. He can go anywhere without suspicion."

"That's a fact," seconded Wilberforce. "Just let Mr. Poggioli see McGabe and make arrangements for the three of us to leave Barbados together."

"Gentlemen," demurred the psychologist with a grave smile, "this matter of evading the police and the passport regulations—I don't want to incriminate myself, even for so worthy an object as protecting the name of an old cricket club."

"We don't want you actually to do anything at all," assured Cheswick at once. "You are the master mind, the consulting hijacker or scofflaw, to use an Americanism. There is no penalty attached to thinking up evasions of the law, Mr. Poggioli, provided you don't do it yourself; otherwise every lawyer would be clapped into Bridewell at once."

Upon the formulation of these plans, Mr. Santee glanced at his watch, and observed that practise would begin in thirty minutes. Thereupon the meeting adjourned. The men passed out of the bank into the street. The psychologist went one direction, Mr. Cheswick another, while the three cricketeers hailed a cab and drove off to their club to resume practise at the ancient and honorable game of cricket.

POGGIOLI for his part moved slowly down the hot dusty street past the solid respectable shops, his mind full of the loose ends of his problem. The salient misfit in the situation seemed to be Cap McGabe. If Cap were the ignorant loutish fellow the Wanderers described, his was not the brain back of the false stock orders. The stock losses themselves puzzled Poggioli. Why should exactly five hundred pounds enter into the criminal combination? Oswald Hemmingway had checked this amount from the bank. Why had he withdrawn it, and what had he done with it?

Poggioli fished patiently for an answer to these questions. He moved on down Broad Street toward Trafalgar Square and perhaps meant to go on to the Carenage where Cap McGabe was in watery hiding, but at the end of two blocks he did a slow about face and started back to the bank. He had no conscious reason for doing this. He was moved by some inner impulse which did not even trouble to explain itself to his conscious mind. The vulgar would have put it that Poggioli "had a hunch" that there was something more to be discovered at the bank. To be more exact, the hunch had Poggioli. He moved slowly back up through the hotly illuminated dullness of Bridgetown, gazing steadfastly at certain mental objects: The five hundred pounds withdrawn from the bank, the speculative losses which balanced the five hundred—It occurred to Poggioli that five hundred pounds was a sum large enough to tempt an ordinary man to almost any crime, whereas to a baronet's son it would be mere spending money. Oswald Hemmingway might well have wagered that whole amount on one cricket game and thought little of it. Abruptly, this last reflection stood out in Poggioli's mind in rubric. It startled him. And the next moment the explanation of the whole riddle flashed upon him bringing a feeling of immense relief. It was as simple as lending an umbrella on a rainy day. Oswald Hemmingway had meant to gamble on the cricket match. He had withdrawn the money from the bank some days beforehand so as to avoid the suspicion of his father who opposed gambling. Then some person discovered he had this money, and knew that he would carry it on his person to the game. The unknown then had worked out elaborate stock losses tallying to a penny with the amount Oswald had withdrawn, and so suggested suicide. After the game was over, and before Hemmingway had paid his debts, this unknown person had stabbed the youth in the bathhouse, rifled his clothes in the confusion caused by the murder, and had escaped. There was more than a touch of the improbable in this theory, but when a man has only one horse he cannot choose his steed.

The moment this solution popped into Poggioli's mind he automatically rejected Cap McGabe as the possible murderer. He believed such complications were beyond the brain of a "red-leg." Then, sliding from one theme into another without any obvious connection, Poggioli found himself trying to recall when it was, and from exactly what direction Mr. Cheswick had entered the piazza of Bay Mansion Hotel. Had he come out of the hotel itself, or entered through the side gate from Beckles Road? The American had no clear-cut reason to suspect Mr. Cheswick, but the fellow seemed to have the brain and a cold sardonic temperament which might work up such a complex crime. If he could only remember whether Cheswick came out of the hotel or through the postern gate—

The American began trying to review just what were his impressions as he sat on the hotel porch in the opening movement of this tragedy. He recollected that he had been thinking of Haiti, and had smelled a peculiar fragrance—

At this point Poggioli really seemed to catch again that odd aroma and glanced up. He was not surprized to see Mr. Cheswick himself standing not far from him, looking at him with a faint equivocal smile on his ruddy face and with a cigar stuck in the yellowed part of his blond, downcurved mustache.

"So you didn't go to the docks after all," observed Cheswick, removing his cigar, looking at the end and beginning an automatic fumbling for his matchbox to relight it.

"No. I was mulling over the details of our problem so I thought I would take a turn back and have all my questions at my tongue's end to ask McGabe when I saw him."

Poggioli really thought that was why he had come back. It sounded reasonable, and two-thirds of the time a man has to guess at his own motives as if he were an arrant stranger to himself.

"Now that's a coincidence," mumbled Mr. Cheswick, relighting his cigar and talking around it in a muffled tone. "For I, too, was walking along chewing on this proposition when it suddenly popped into my head that you knew something else about McGabe—or about Hemmingway—or something—"

Mr. Cheswick removed his cigar, now fully lighted, and waved it vaguely.

"Knew something about what?"

"Those questions you were asking in the bank about McGabe—was he educated, was he a cunning fellow—it just struck me you must have something back of that?"

"Why, no-o." Poggioli shook his head slowly.

"Come now, why should you ask if McGabe was cunning if you didn't have some sort of evidence to make you think he was cunning?"

Mr. Cheswick stuck his tobacco into his mouth again; its perfumed smoke drifted up and caused him to close one pale eye so that he now stood with one eye closed and the other stretched wide in a sort of grotesque interrogation.

"Come," he pursued, "confess; you threw the other boys off the track easy enough because they were thinking about cricket, but not me. I was thinking the same thing you were. What new thing have you found out?"

Poggioli began laughing.

"You take a deep interest in this case to be a rank outsider, Mr. Cheswick."

The blond gentleman's highly colored face went a shade pinker.

"I don't see I'm such an outsider. I have a moral reason for wanting to know any—er—new information."

The droll way men invent reasons for their actions reimpressed itself upon Poggioli for the hundredth time. He laughed with more amusement than ever.

"What is your moral reason, Mr. Cheswick?"

"Why, —— it, if I'm to escort McGabe out of this country, I ought to know the full case against him. I am, you might say, his executioner."

Poggioli laughed more heartily than ever.

"Nobody is sure you are going to escort him out of the country."

"Certainly I have to find him first."

Poggioli stopped laughing but continued with an amused smile on his face.

"I'm sorry I haven't anything new against him. You are like all the rest of the fellows, seem to think I'm a magician. If I inquire if a man is tall, short, dull or keen, you think that is the clew to the maze. It's all because of that confounded article in the *Times*. They tooted me up as a sleight-of-hand performer who can run his hand into an empty bag—" here Poggioli made a reaching gesture, "and pull out a murderer!"

Here Poggioli caught Cheswick's lapel and mimicked holding him up to an audience.

Mr. Cheswick's cigar tumbled out of his mouth. He stared for a moment at the American with wide pale eyes, then burst into great laughter.

"I'll be swizzled if you aren't more of a card than I thought. Why ——, do you know for the moment, I fancied—"

Mr. Cheswick did not have opportunity to say what for the moment he fancied; he stopped laughing with disconcerting abruptness, and looked soberly toward the bank.

Poggioli glanced around and saw Sir Alexander and Hodges standing on the top of the bank steps. Hodges was pointing and said.

"Yonder he is, sir."

The next moment the banker beckoned the psychologist. Both the American and Cheswick went up. Sir Alexander addressed them in agitated tones.

"Gentlemen, we have found the five hundred. The bank has lost nothing, nothing at all!"

The American stared as his theory of the crime fell abruptly to pieces.

"Found the five hundred!" he repeated blankly.

The baronet clenched his fists with almost an hysterical gesture.

"Oh my —— yes! The uncertainty, the suspense, the tragic mystery that surrounds my poor dead boy—"

Mr. Cheswick was getting out another cigar.

"I think the best thing we can do," he said with his eyes on his case, "is to go in and have a look at the five hundred they found."

WHEN the men entered the bank they found the paying teller had discovered the missing money, a package of Bank of England notes stuck away in a corner inside the vault. Outside of the package, in Oswald Hemmingway's handwriting was the sentence—"Do not place in circulation, O. H."

The baronet stood wiping his eyes, looking at the notes spread out on a table.

"This clears Oswald of any action unbecoming to a banker and a gentleman."

"I wish he had made a notation why the notes should not be returned to circulation," said the paying teller.

Poggioli bent over the bills scrutinizing them.

"They are not counterfeited or raised?"

"Hodges is investigating that point now," said the banker.

Mr. Cheswick stood twisting his yellowed mustache.

"It is possible, Sir Alexander, that these notes are entirely disconnected with your son's tragedy."

The baronet shook his head.

"I can't think that. Yet what connection can there be between a sum of money retired from circulation and Oswald's death?"

Cheswick who stood staring at the money asked suddenly.

"Sir Alexander, will you sell me one of these notes?"

"Why?"

"I want to take it to the wharf, try to find Cap McGabe and confront him with it."

"You can take as many as you like without purchase."

"No," demurred Cheswick drawing out a wallet of colonial currency, "to exchange money is no loss to either of us; then if I should happen not to return it, you would be whole."

The banker made an assenting gesture.

Mr. Cheswick riffled over the notes.

"I'll take this one. It has a spot on it so I won't get it mixed with the other money in my purse."

Poggioli glanced at the note in question and saw a bluish smudge near its center. Apart from this smudge the paper appeared perfectly new, without even a crease to mark its crispness.

As Mr. Cheswick took the note, Poggioli stared at it with a feeling of retarded recognition. The blond gentleman stowed it away and bowed himself out of the bank, saying he would go and find McGabe. Not till he was gone did the American recall the bank note at the cable office marked with a similar smudge. A nervous spasm caught his throat. He made a movement to rush out of the bank and catch Cheswick up, but a second impulse held him back to the table where he made a hurried examination of the rest of the notes. Certainty seized the American that somehow the bluish spot formed a clew to the mystery and Cheswick knew it. Then, for a moment, Poggioli was astonished that Cheswick wanted a clew.

While these thoughts chased through his head he was turning the reverse sides of the notes with nervous rapidity. By good luck he found another faint bluish smudge on an edge. His relief at this find answered his question. The smudge was a clew. Cheswick had purchased the note to obliterate his own tracks. The American picked out the other stained note with a feeling of narrow escape.

"I'll take this one, Sir Alexander," and he reached in his pocket to pay for it.

The baronet made a gesture.

"No, take it along."

Poggioli murmured his thanks and hurried to the full light of a window to examine the note to which Mr. Dwight, hours earlier, had directed his attention.

As he did so Hodges came into the room with a circular letter he had found in the files.

"This is what we were after, Sir Alexander," he said in an excited voice. "I've found the numbers of the notes."

"What has happened to them?"

"They were stolen from the Bank of England on the third of January. We received this look-out circular about two months ago. Its corner was crimped down, sir, as you see."

The baronet took the sheet which rattled in his hand.

"Oswald did that, to refer to it quickly."

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"My unfortunate son!"

"But why didn't he report the stolen money at once!" cried Hodges. "Why did he simply retire it?"

Poggioli interrupted their speculations.

"Mr. Hodges," he requested, "have you a magnifying glass?"

The clerk brought one and the American bent down to a careful scrutiny of the stain.

It seems a pity that Mr. Dwight of the cable office could not have seen him at the moment.

The stain itself, however, was not very dramatic. It was simply dirt, a touch of clay. Poggioli assembled two or three particles on the white paper and ran the back of his thumb nail over them; they made a soft streak—a stain of blue clay.

This was as informing as would have been a sparrow track, a rain drop or the leaf of any tree. He could turn anywhere in wood or field, in mine or on mountain top and find clay.

Poggioli straightened up in keen frustration. His clew pointed in any direction he cared to look; an obsequious clew!

The American had no clear-cut idea of what he had expected to find. A finger-print, perhaps; one of Mr. Cheswick's own finger-prints possibly. It suddenly occurred to Poggioli that the other note did have on it one of Mr. Cheswick's finger-prints, and the fellow had leaped to rescue this betraying sign.

Ideas now rushed rapidly in on the American.

"Hodges," he called, "was that five hundred pounds all that was stolen from the Bank of England according to your circular?"

"Bless you, no!" cried the clerk. "Here's the list, sir. It tots up fifty thousand pounds."

"A quarter of a million dollars! Now there, gentlemen, at last, is a sufficient incentive for murder!"

"What do you mean?" cried the baronet.

"I mean the man who murdered your son has a fortune of fifty thousand pounds in stolen bank notes hidden somewhere. He is traveling through the remote provinces trying to sell these bulletined notes by the little so nothing will be suspected. Oswald cashed a few, discovered the notes were stolen, and the thief murdered him before he revealed his discovery."

A pallor spread over the baronet's thin face. "Certainly, how simple it is! Who do you suppose did it—not—McGabe."

"I'm going down to the dock this moment and work out the details with Cheswick."

"But wait! Wait!" cried the banker, "Mr. Cheswick is a—er—"

"Yes, sir, what is it?"

The banker's eyes were wide. He looked into Poggioli's face and stammered.

"Perhaps you have a better grasp of the situation than I."

THE American left the bank and went legging it down through the hot street on the lookout for Mr. Cheswick. He hurried to Trafalgar Square and stared up and down the waterside out over the forest of masts in the Carenage. He strained his attention over the myriad figures that swarmed the waterside. The place worked like a formicary. The hopelessness of finding any particular man in the crowded sun-shot jam forced itself upon the American. Also it told him how safe was Cap McGabe in his waterlogged retreat.

As Poggioli moved up and down the hot wharf, squinting his eyes and rather hopeless of finding any one he knew, he heard his name shouted in the din. He looked around and saw Wilberforce and Mr. Santee hurrying to him through the crowd. When they drew near, Santee called—

"We've been looking everywhere for you; thought you were down here hours ago!"

"I'm looking for Cheswick," explained Poggioli in a tone which invited their cooperation.

"He's not here!" cried Wilberforce.

"Where is he?"

"We met him in a motor going out Bay Street as we came in from the club. He said he was going out to look at Codrington College."

"Look at what?" echoed Poggioli in amazement.

"Codrington College," repeated Mr. Santee. "He said he wanted to see it before he left Barbados. You know it's one of our show places; the oldest university in the West Indies. It was founded in 1710; two years older than our cricket club."

Poggioli was struck dumb. For a bank robber and a murderer, in the midst of an effort to escape suddenly to turn tourist and motor off to admire the ivied walls of an old college; that was too much for the American. He stood blinking his eyes.

"Did he say when he was coming back?"

"Said he would meet us here about four; for us to go right ahead and make arrangements with McGabe."

Both Wilberforce and Santee seemed to think this the most natural thing in the world for Cheswick to do. Poggioli had a sinking sensation that he had seen his last of Mr. Cheswick. He suspected that the fellow had sensed the suspicion in which he was held; as no doubt he had. The American brought his harassed thoughts back to the subject in hand.

"How have you fellows got on with your search for Cap McGabe?"

"We've got feelers out for him."

"How?"

"A Captain Dorgan on a schooner out there," Santee nodded toward the Carenage, "saw Cap, and chucked him a bite to eat. Said if he saw him again he would appoint an hour for him to meet us."

"And then what'll we tell him?"

"We'll tell him there's a slaver called the *Laughing Lass* lying just outside the harbor. She's sailing for Santo Domingo up our east coast tonight. I thought we could run McGabe onto the schooner as a nigger laborer."

"How'll you do that?"

Mr. Santee grinned and drew out of his pocket a box of shoe polish.

"Black him up. If the harbor police see us taking him out, they'll think he's a nigger. I've arranged with a waterman to take us out at four-thirty."

"If you can meet McGabe."

"Certainly."

By this time Poggioli had fallen in with his two acquaintances and the three walked down to the wharf, got aboard a schooner, crossed her deck to another, and so from one boat to another, picked their way to Captain Dorgan's vessel out in the Carenage. In the unobstructed sunshine, tar boiled out of the seams of the decks; an odor of bilge water, of sugar, of oakum and the sea saturated the hot air. Noises of clicking capstans, creaking sails, chanting sailors and shouting negroes assailed their ears.

As they clambered from vessel to vessel Mr. Santee explained what a slave ship was; a schooner which transported negro labor from one island in the West Indies to another without the formality of passports; for indeed such wholesale shipping of labor was against the British laws.

"It seems," observed Poggioli, fishing out his handkerchief to mop his face, "that we are continually running afoul of the law at every turn."

Mr. Santee glanced his surprize.

"Certainly, these matters have to be arranged. Barbados is one of the most densely populated spots on earth. We have thousands and thousands of negro laborers who have got to be jobbed around or they'll starve. There isn't work enough here. The British labor laws are merely a theory that follows actual practise more or less closely. Just here it is a little wide. Parliament may eventually revise the statutes to make them fit."

This English notion of arranging law to fit conduct surprized Poggioli who was accustomed to the American idea of arranging human life to fit some theory. It struck him that both systems were rather like shoes; an old pair of shoes and a new pair of shoes. His reflections were cut short by Mr. Santee calling out—

"Cap'n Dorgan on deck!"

THE three men had come to a schooner, the *Laughing Lass* of Halifax, Nova Scotia. As Santee shouted, a short, stocky, sandy-haired sailor turned out of a hammock which was swung under a canvas stretched over the after deck of the vessel. This fellow stood rubbing his eyes and blinking as he watched the three men climb over his rail and come aboard.

"Here he is!" called Santee with the exuberance of one exhibiting a curiosity.

"Don't say so!" ejaculated the captain, stretching his eyes to wake himself, then he lifted a hand in salute to Poggioli.

"They tell me, sir, you're a great detective. I daresay you're something fancy with a pistol, or throwing a knife, sir."

The college professor hardly knew how to answer such a burst of admiration. Evidently Captain Dorgan had drawn his conception of a detective from the "Old Sleuth" series.

"Did you ever see McGabe again?" queried Poggioli.

"Yes, I told him to be here at four."

"Did he say he would?"

"Said he'd listen for the ships' bells, sir."

"None of the police have been nosing around your boat?" inquired Wilberforce.

"A nigger dressed up like a girl come aboard. When I saw he was a man, I told him I'd pipe him if I needed him."

Everybody laughed. Santee glanced at his watch.

"Well, all we've got to do is to wait here and see if he shows up."

He glanced around at his companions who agreed wordlessly that was all there was to do. The three men moved automatically back to the shade of the canvas. Here they seated themselves on a coil of rope, a cask, and Captain Dorgan found Poggioli a canvas covered folding stool, then he sat down in his hammock.

The American began trying to fathom Cheswick's last move. Thinking was difficult with the other men talking, and the sun beating the canvas overhead until it felt like a stove radiating heat. Reflections from the water fell on the underside of the canvas and drew upon it wavering designs of light. The light circled or marched in rows or fell into tremulous confusion. Drops of sweat trickling down inside of Poggioli's clothes felt like crawling insects. The heat pressed down on the American's skull like the thumb of a giant. Poggioli blinked the sting of perspiration out of his eyes and thought doggedly of Codrington College; Cheswick's visit to Codrington College. Presently an explanation filtered into his heat-drugged brain. Cheswick had made that as an excuse to go and bring the rest of his stolen banknotes aboard the schooner preparatory to leaving the country.

The American shook the stuffiness out of his head and planned what to do. He must get in touch with some of the harbor police and seize Cheswick when he reappeared with the notes. That would be a sharp, sensational end to the man-hunt. The melodrama appealed to Poggioli even under a Barbadan sun.

Captain Dorgan arose from his hammock and said he would go below for the makings of a gin swizzle. At that moment from over the harbor came a myriad of little ringing double taps of the bells of many vessels. A little later the reflections on the underside of the canvas awning fell into a wild flurry; with it came a soft plashing below. Instead of going down into his cabin, Dorgan turned to the rail with the low observation.

"There's McGabe."

Wilberforce strode to the rail and stood in the white flame of the sun.

"That you, Cap?" he called down softly.

"Yes, sir."

"Cap, we've seen the old man; we've got you off."

"Have you, sir."

"Provided you are willing to clear out of Barbados."

"Wha-at?"

"Leave the island."

Came a silence broken by a faint plashing, then a dubious—

"Where to, sir?"

"We've got a passage for you on a slave ship going to Santo."

"With niggers?" sharply.

"That's the only way you can get away and the police not see you."

The man in the water evidently chewed on this. The enmity between the red-legs and the negroes had begun when both were slaves in the Barbadan sugar fields, and time had only strengthened the rancor between them.

"I wouldn't want to go with the niggers, sir—after being a gentleman in a gentleman's cricket club."

Poggioli stepped to the rail. He looked down but could see nothing as the fugitive kept himself covered by the schooner's overhang.

"It will be a lot better than soaking here in the Carenage, Cap; you'll be with the schooner for three or four days, then you'll be turned loose in Santo a free man."

The top of a head and two eyes floated cautiously out in the oily water and looked up the side of the *Laughing Lass*.

"Who are you?" asked Cap suspiciously.

"The man your mother employed to look after your case. That was the best I could do; make those arrangements with Sir Alexander."

The eyes stared up strickenly at Poggioli.

"I didn't kill Mister Oswald, I'll swear I didn't."

Poggioli made a gesture.

"I've thought that over, this is the easiest way out for you."

Mr. Santee took up the conversation.

"Cap, here's a box of shoe polish. Catch it and black your face. If the police see you they'll think you're a nigger."

The red-leg was humiliated; after a lifelong feud with the negroes to become one of them!

"You can wash off on the schooner. She's standing outside the harbor now. We'll have a water-man pick you up in a dory in about half an hour. You swim to the stern of that steamer that lies right across the Carenage from the customs house; we'll come by and pick you up. Black your face."

Santee dropped the blacking. The water-soaked figure caught the polish and the next moment, with a faint swirl, vanished from sight. The lights under the canvas leaped to and fro in silent fury.

POGGIOLI straightened up with a sun-ache in his temples. He must go at once and get the police. He was framing an excuse to get away from his companions when he looked through the glare of sunshine and saw Mr. Cheswick making his way toward them. He climbed from vessel to vessel evidently in high good humor. He mopped his face and waved his handkerchief at the men.

Then Poggioli was dismayed to see that Cheswick had no baggage.

Santee answered his friend's gaiety with a responsive wave.

"Everything's all arranged!" he called.

Cheswick stroked his mustache with his handkerchief.

"Fine! Topping!"

The three men were deserting the *Laughing Lass* without ceremony, hurrying to join Cheswick.

"How'd you like Codrington?" cried Santee.

"Very, very much!" pæned Cheswick.

"Ever been there before?" asked Wilberforce.

"First visit."

A certain impishness entered Poggioli's aching head.

"Which did you consider the most beautiful building, Mr. Cheswick?"

Cheswick hesitated.

"The library."

"What points did you admire especially?"

The blond gentleman scratched his head.

"Well, I especially admired—er—the memorial window to Sir Philip Easton, and then over in the chapel I thought the old mahogany stalls very, very lovely."

Poggioli glanced at Santee and Wilberforce to see if Mr. Cheswick was describing actualities. They were nodding their heads. He was.

Mr. Cheswick actually had made a pilgrimage to Codrington. The man's conduct subscribed to no rationale whatsoever.

Santee came back to the business in hand.

"We have arranged for you and Wilberforce to get to Santo Domingo with McGabe on a slaver, she sails at four thirty." He glanced at his watch. "And we've only twenty minutes to go."

"Righto!" cried Cheswick in a great mood. "Let's get to the pier!"

The four men hurried across the boats, jumped ashore and started almost at a trot for the dory pier.

It suddenly struck Poggioli that these men were going to slip right out of his hands, and there was no way to stop them. As they approached the pier half a dozen black boatmen came running shouting the names of their dories—

"The *Majestic*, masters!" "The *Titanic!*" "*Princess Mary* will set you over, gentlemen!"

One fat doryman laughed and shouted

in the grotesque gargling English peculiar to the West Indian negro—

"Dem gen'lemen, done ingage de *Mauretania* half hour ago!"

The *Mauretania* was a brightly painted dory with white canvas upholstering on the seats. Poggioli's heart sank as he saw his companions hurry down the steps of the pier to the dory. Everything seemed quite lost. Just then Mr. Cheswick hesitated.

"By the way, does it happen that this nigger ship is going to sail around the coast to Bathsheba?"

Santee said she was.

"Fine!" cried the blond gentlemen. "I have a little baggage I really ought to get aboard with me. If you will indulge me by letting me take the train to Bathsheba, I'll get aboard tomorrow morning when the schooner reaches that port."

"Certainly," cried Wilberforce, "I'll be on the lookout."

"Righto!" cried Cheswick.

Santee, Poggioli and Cheswick stood on the pier and waved Wilberforce off. The trio watched the dory pull away and stop under the stern of the freighter that lay just across from the custom house. There something was pulled into the *Mauretania*. It might have been a sack. It lay flat down in the bottom of the dory under the beating sun. It was such a trifling detail in the torrid animation of the harbor that nobody could have observed it except the three men on the pier.

THAT night Poggioli went around to the police station on Coleridge Street and asked for a plain-clothes man to stand watch on Bathsheba wharf on the following day. At first the police sergeant demanded bruskly enough the reason for such an unusual request, but when he discovered he was addressing Mr. Poggioli he became at once respectful, not to say obsequious.

"Yes, sir, I've heard of you; read about you in the *Times*. I'd take it as a great privilege to cooperate with such a distinguished criminologist. There will not only be a man down there, Mr. Poggioli, I'll be there myself. All you'll have to do, sir, is simply give me the tip who you want pinched, sir, and I'll pinch 'em. You needn't be known in it at all."

This appealed to Poggioli as being the ideal procedure for a criminal investigator; the planning brain while other men applied the physical force. Poggioli had the Latin aristocrat's dislike for all violent physical contacts which has sublimated even their personal encounters to the finical but deadly aloofness of dueling.

The plan put him in high spirits and sent him walking briskly through the night to his hotel. Once or twice a wonderment came to him as to what could have prompted Mr. Cheswick to make his excursion to Codrington College. Could the thief have buried his banknotes in the campus of that ancient institution? Such a disposal would possess unexpectedness. On the other hand, Mr. Cheswick might have visited the old seat of learning out of a traveler's curiosity. His visit to Codrington probably could not be linked up with the stolen banknotes.

WHEN Poggioli reached Bay Mansion Hotel, he found the guests sitting on the dimly illuminated piazza talking of the tragedy. The psychologist saw Mr. Cheswick, and threaded the groups to ask him when the early morning train started for Bathsheba. Then he went on up to his bedroom. It struck Poggioli as rather a salty thing that he should be asking Cheswick about the train schedule which would land the fellow, if everything went right, on the gallows.

Next morning the professor awoke with a certain feeling of imminent adventure which he seldom before had experienced. Borne on the wings of this stimulation he hurried through his bath, then down to the breakfast room where a lazy black boy spread before him a sweet lemon, coffee, rolls and fried flying fish.

At this hour the breakfast room was deserted and the psychologist asked the boy if Mr. Cheswick had come down. He had not. Poggioli looked at his watch, then sent the boy up to wake his—he hesitated in his thoughts between "friend," "traveling companion" and "victim."

The boy went up and in a few minutes came back down with the news that Mr. Cheswick was not in his room, that he must have gone to the beach for an early dip.

It was getting train time. The American deserted the remnants of his breakfast and hurried down to the beach to look for his—he decided on the term "man." Then he recalled that police officers, detectives, sheriffs, etc., etc., always used the word "man." Looking for their "man"; catching their "man"; hanging their "man"—a loathsome euphemism by which they disguised their treacherous trade!

ON THE beach, only a fat old man and two Barbadian women were bathing. Just as he saw there was no Mr. Cheswick visible, he heard the distant rattle of a tram on Bay Street. He turned and went sprinting back to the thoroughfare which he reached in time to swing aboard and ride down-town.

At any other time than this he would have enjoyed the slow village-like progression of the mule car; the jingling bells, the lush trees leaning their green branches over the walls, the upright palms, the bland light of early morning in which lingered the perfume of a tropical night as delicately sweet as the memory of a tryst with a woman. Ordinarily he would have been charmed.

This morning all the poetry was lost in a growing uneasiness in regard to Mr. Cheswick. Poggioli looked over the crowded tram, full of negroes going to work, seeking his "man's" face. Cheswick was not on the car.

The mules jingled along. The black passengers laughed and talked noisily after the manner of their kind. The ride was interminable. Poggioli could not decide whether to go on and catch the train for Bathsheba or to drop off down-town and institute a search for Cheswick here in Bridgetown. The obstacle was, if he found Cheswick without the notes, he would have no proof of his guilt. He decided he would go on and risk Cheswick being on the train.

Just before the tram passed over the bridge at the Carenage, Poggioli dropped off the running-board and ran across Fairchild Street to the station. A small army of negroes were being sucked into the depot for the morning train. The American darted in among them, got to the ticket window, bought a first-class ticket and hurried out to the train where he got a seat by a window to scrutinize the crowd as it climbed aboard up and down the line of cars.

The train itself was a very tiny affair, but slightly larger than the toy railroads children ride at street fairs in America. Ahead, the engine was whistling like a peanut roaster. The little coaches filled rapidly. Evidently the little thing meant to be off in a pair of minutes.

As Mr. Cheswick continued not to appear, uneasiness wound up in Poggioli more and more, like the spring of an alarm-clock. He was on the point of jumping off when the little train made a lunge, the cars moved, then went clicking off up the little two-foot track at quite a brisk gait.

As soon as the train was out of town the dusty white Barbadian landscape began a slow turn-table effect outside the car window. Everything was white; the fences dividing the dusty white fields of sugar cane; the stone cottages, bungalows and negro huts; old-fashioned windmills which flapped their white sails on the horizon like great lazy birds too languid to fly. Now and then the train passed a park of great mahogany trees, their profound green filmed with white dust. Seated back in the grove Poggioli would glimpse the white walls or roof of a venerable old English manor; the eminently respectable country seat of some ultra English Barbadian aristocrat, like Sir Alexander Hemmingway. An amazing folk, the English; nobody quite like them in the world. Poggioli wondered, where was Cheswick?

The continual white glare pained the American's eyes and he turned back inside the coach to avoid it. Then he observed to his seat mate in a vaguely complaining voice.

"They build absolutely everything on this island of white stone."

This seat mate, now that Poggioli looked at him was an old gentleman with white whiskers, russet face, tempery nose and high-cut nostrils. He regarded Poggioli, evidently astonished and incensed at being addressed in a public conveyance.

"Certainly," he replied stiffly, "this island is formed of white coral rock. We are hardly wealthy enough to import colored stone to build ornamental fences around our sugar fields for the delectation of American tourists."

This typically British reply, with its quietly acid way of telling the other fellow to go to the ——, shut up Poggioli for a few minutes.

A little later, with American persistency, he made another effort to engage the old war-horse. He said something about the shocking murder that had been committed on the cricket grounds. The old gentleman observed that all murders were shocking in Barbados, he didn't know how they were regarded in America. After that Poggioli remained silent.

The little train rattled on amid the hot, blanched scenery. It stopped at half a dozen stations; folk got on and off; everywhere Poggioli strained his attention over these movements of the crowds, hoping Cheswick had gone ahead to take the train at some station beyond Bridgetown, but he saw nothing of him. In about an hour and a half the train ran into Bathsheba. There Poggioli and his gruff seat-mate both got out. The old gentleman set off at a stout walk, for his home, where no doubt he was a loving husband and a tender father. The English are a wonderful people.

The American himself, unfortunately, had no such decision of purpose. He stood for a moment on the asphalt driveway outside the railway station, orienting himself on this new town. It was a characteristic English watering place. Big rooming houses lined the boulevard, and still higher up on an acclivity stood a fashionable hotel with an English ensign floating from a tall flagpole. Down below, on the right-hand side, looking northward, lay the harbor with a few old piers thrust out into the liquid turquoise of the ocean. Northward beyond the piers curved the long pure-white arc of the beach, spotted here and there with the reds and greens of parasols and bathing-suits.

It seemed to Poggioli that this brilliantly white beach was a very focussing of the whole blanched island of Barbados. It shrilled at the psychologist that Barbados was white. It italicised the fact so persistently that a certain curious notion filtered into Poggioli's head that this fanfare of white was not purely objective, that it held some private and particular meaning for him and him alone.

He moved along slowly, staring at it, pondering the color, wondering what conceivable connection this whiteness had with Oswald Hemmingway's murder. The association seemed, as the saying goes, right on the tip of his tongue, but eventually it eluded him. He had the miserable feeling that something in his head softly closed. Whatever was on the threshold of recognition sank into the limbo of the unconscious. The beach became simply an ordinary stretch of white coral sand, and a queer depression of spirit settled over Poggioli.

He moved on somberly down the wharf for the simple part he was about to play. He would await the arrival of the *Hercules*. Then, when Cheswick attempted to board her with a bag, he would have him arrested. If, on the other hand, Cheswick did not come, then Wilberforce and McGabe would sail on to Santo. The unfortunate red-leg would be rusticated through no crime of his own, while the real thief and murderer would escape. English justice would make a characteristic bungle, but over the whole affair would hang a certain drab veil of respectability.

Poggioli spat and climbed down a flight of ancient wooden steps full of landings and turns that led from the level of the driveway down between two tall rooming houses, over one back yard, around another and so to the level of the beach and piers.

ON THE sand were a number of little fishing boats, left careened by the outgoing tide. A browned fisherman sat under the shade of a boat repairing his net with the endless patience of his tribe. Poggioli approached this fellow and asked when the *Hercules* was expected in. The fisherman paused in the midst of a small but intricate knot.

"The *Hercules*, sir? P'raps you mean the *Albatross?*"

"No, the *Hercules;* she's due from Bridgetown today sometime," repeated the American uneasily.

The old fellow shook his head.

"You must mean the *Albatross*, sir; she runs from here to Bridgetown every other day."

"The *Hercules*," explained Poggioli, "is a slaver. She's bound to Santo with a cargo of negroes."

The seamed face became full of comprehension.

"I see, she's in no reg'lar trade. Then she won't come in the harbor here, naturally, sir. You know it's against the law, exporting labor wholesale. We couldn't have her coming right into port taking on niggers. That wouldn't be right, sir. No, I say let everything be done decent and respectable—"

"But how the —— does she get her passengers!" cried Poggioli, thoroughly impatient at this rambling homily.

"Why she picks 'em up along the coast, sir."

"No especial place?"

"None in partic'lar, sir. The niggers go out to her in jack boats in a decent underhand sort of way."

"Where is she now?"

"I fancy she's just over the horizon there, tacking up and down the coast till she gets her men, sir."

"And where can I see the small boats coming in and going out?" asked the American, anxiously.

"Not here in Bathsheba, naturally. We couldn't have nothing like that right under our eyes, sir. But if you'd tramp up and down the coast, say five or six miles, sir, you might happen to see a jack boat going out loaded with niggers, or coming in empty. If you did it would probably be bound for the *Hercules*, or just getting back from her."

Mr. Poggioli, who had been stooping involuntarily to peer into his informant's face, now straightened and stared up and down the white strand with a lost feeling. Cheswick might be anywhere. The psychologist was seized with an irrational notion that at this moment Cheswick was somewhere along the coast, escaping to the *Hercules* with his loot. But the sheer whiteness seemed to weave a maze in which no fugitive could ever be found. Then a certain tenuous suggestion from the color itself filtered once more into the American's mind. He framed a question to the fisherman.

"By the way, friend, in all this white scenery, do you happen to know whether there is any clay near here?"

The old fellow removed his pipe and fell into thought. With an ordinary laborer's disconnectedness, it did not strike him as odd for a man to inquire about slave ships one moment and clay the next.

"Clay, sir? You've come to a bad island for clay. Precious little here. Now if you'd care for sandstone, sir—"

"No, it's clay—blue clay."

The old man thought again.

"Blue clay, blue clay—since you mention it, I do bear in mind a little outcrop of blue clay down at the crab coves, sir. You might get enough to daub a cooking-place with, but if you want to make brick—"

A little thrill of exultation shot through Poggioli.

"Where are the crab coves?" he snapped.

The old man pointed down toward the south.

"About two miles down the beach. You'll know 'em by a thicket of sea grape growing around 'em. You can't miss 'em."

This last sentence was wasted as Poggioli already had turned and was dashing down the white sand at a pace which he could not possibly hold for two miles. Whatever the old fisherman thought of a tourist who began talking of slavers and started on a dead run at the mention of blue clay, Poggioli never found out.

The psychologist was thinking how simple was the clue of the blue stains, now that the solution had struck him. Cheswick had hidden his notes in the crab caverns, buried no doubt in the clay. In getting the five hundred pounds out, he had stained a note or two. It was this simple reasoning that had been stirring in his mind back up on the driveway. Now it flooded him with a great elation. Presently his failing legs in the hot morning sunshine slowed him down much to his impatience. The run became a trot, then a hurried walk down the linen whiteness of the sand.

He wanted to run again. It seemed to Poggioli that each instant was allowing Cheswick to escape. It was an absurd feeling, but as Poggioli hurried down the sinuous, bi-colored stretch of white beach and blue sea, it seemed that Cheswick was escaping over and over again. So long as Poggioli could see nothing except the dazzling empty perspective of white and blue, Cheswick continued his momentary escapes. Then far out across the water, the American caught the flicker of a small boat's sail. That stabilized his fancy and pegged Cheswick to an exact position. The boat was something definite to race against. Poggioli had either a good deal of time to spare, or he was already too late. He stopped his leaden trot and stared at the distant fleck of canvas. It was either coming or going, he couldn't tell which. At every beat of his heart the sail vibrated up and down. He mopped his face, blinked the sweat from his stinging eyes, and peered with face screwed up against the glare. If the small boat was outbound, then he must turn and hurry back to Bathsheba, notify the police sergeant and get a revenue launch to the *Hercules*. If the boat was inbound, he would get down to the beach, hide in the sea grapes and verify his own deductions.

THE American eventually decided the boat was coming in. He started down the beach where he could see the gray-green sea-grapes painted on the lower slopes of the cliffs.

As he hurried forward, he began to be anxious lest some one on the boat should see his dark form against his white background. Certainly unaided eyes could not pick him up at this distance, but seafaring men usually have binoculars. No doubt those far-away boatmen were scanning the coast for Cheswick, or at least for bearings to locate the cavern of the crabs. The sea grape thicket was about a quarter of a mile distant, and he made a last run for it.

This last dash Poggioli made on sheer doggedness. The boat was coming rapidly in. Poggioli flung all his strength into getting across that last stretch of hot white sand. He finished with a drumming heart and flung himself prone on the ground in the edge of the thicket. He gasped for breath through a dry mouth. His legs felt paralyzed. Face and clothes were drenched with sweat. He swallowed slime. He lay with his head limp in the crook of his elbow and the sunlight pulsed red through his closed eyelids. But he was happy. He had worked the whole thing out so cleverly; a series of bungles, it is true, but after all, all reasoning is a series of trials and errors. There is no compulsive logic holding any two human propositions together. The feel of logic is merely our reaction to sequences. Berkely was right and Kant wrong. Great reasoners are simply lucky guessers—or inspired gropers. He himself had groped in this tangle from one hypothesis to another and now here he was with verity arrived at, which was, concretely, a quarter of a million dollars in bank notes. It was one of the happiest moments of Poggioli's life.

He opened his eyes, shook his head, then lifted himself cautiously to get the exact position of the boat. As he did so a voice in the thicket snarled—

"Poggioli, do you want your —— empty head blown off?"

The psychologist was struck to stone in a half risen posture. Then he peered slowly around and presently made out the shape of Mr. Cheswick among the bushes some twenty- or thirty feet distant. The thing he could see most clearly was the glint of a drawn pistol; the murderer's clothes were of the same dull gray as the grape branches.

"No-o, I don't," stuttered Poggioli in a whisper, realizing for the first time that he was pursuing a bank robber, a murderer and a desperate man.

"Then lie back down, one dead man's enough on a job like this."

So the fellow had a conscience. Poggioli subsided again on his belly, deeply grateful for that fact. He supposed he would not be killed. He wondered what Cheswick would do with him to prevent his return to Bathsheba; shanghai him possibly; a voyage on the slaver—

He lifted his head slowly and peered at Cheswick among the cross hatching of the sea grape stems. It seemed to him that he was seeing the man for the first time; a naked foe of all men.

Even in the midst of his danger a kind of understanding of such a gusty, wanton, salty existence crept into Poggioli's chameleon mind. The imbecility of his own approach amazed him, but in the same breath explained itself to him in the highly complimentary terms a man's own mind always explains itself. It was simply because he was a sublimated intellect, and pure intelligence has never yet felt fear or taken a precaution. Only the animal emotions in man make him defensive and crafty. Pure cognition never has a queasy moment; it knows everything and avoids nothing. There idiot and sage meet—Archimedes slaughtered in Syracuse while drawing circles in the sand.

Even while this analysis ran through his mind, the psychologist was speculating on what Cheswick would do with him; take him aboard the *Hercules;* bind him and leave him in the cavern until the schooner was clear of the island; or possibly, after all, kill him.

In the midst of this gristly speculation the keel of a boat grated on the sand below. Poggioli remained motionless, staring with his whole sensorium alert. Now he could hear some one from the boat pushing his way up among the small growth.

Even in his own jeopardy this little circumstance hit him as odd. It was, in fact, faintly contradictory to his own dilemma. It is not correct psychology for a boatman to leave his boat and grope among bushes for his passenger. An intimation that he had made some strange and fundamental error began to move in Poggioli. He lifted his head and stared through the bushes with wide speculative eyes.

The man from the boat pushed on through the sea grapes and apparently disappeared in the earth. He passed abruptly out of sight and hearing. For some ten minutes came a silence. Then as a curious and amazing hypothesis began to dawn on the American came a renewed rustle in the bushes. The next instant, Mr. Cheswick launched out of his hiding. Came an explosion of blows, curses, snarls. Poggioli leaped to his feet to see two men fighting among the bushes. As he jumped up they went down, rolling and crashing under the gray cover. Poggioli hurried toward them and out of the uproar he heard Mr. Cheswick pant—

"Grab his gun, quick, Poggioli! He'll kill himself—or me!"

For the fraction of an instant the American hesitated, the Latin in him loathing the physical contact, next moment he plunged under the foliage and his head and shoulder came squarely upon Wilberforce and Cheswick grappling on the ground. Cheswick was straining Wilberforce's arm up from his pocket. The psychologist gripped this upstretched arm, whipped around and caught it in the crotch of his leg with a scissors hold. This left Cheswick a free hand. He jerked handcuffs from his pocket and snapped one on Wilberforce's left, then he maneuvered the other loop up to the hand Poggioli held, and the outlaw was manacled. Cheswick then ran a deft hand over the outside of Wilberforce's clothes, located a pistol and removed it. Then he got up, walked a few steps back up in the bushes and picked up a tin container full of bank notes.

"Now," he puffed, and with the same breath gave a short laugh, "you can let him up, Poggioli."

The American professor got up off the prisoner, filled with a just indignation.

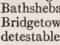
"Why in the —— didn't you—"

Cheswick's mustache gave a downward quirk.

"I didn't like what you said on the hotel porch; a detective's occupation being the most —— in the world; and then if I had confided in you, you might have published it in the *Times*—"

Poggioli was angrier than ever. He brushed the white sand from his clothes, then he did the same for Wilberforce, who couldn't assist himself. On Wilberforce's garments were two or three smudges of blue clay.

Mr. Cheswick sent the negroes in the long boat back to the *Hercules*, then the three men began a stolid silent tramp back to Bathsheba to make the afternoon train to Bridgetown. Mr. Cheswick wore a fixed, detestable grin under his yellowed mustache.



ON THE following day an article appeared in the Bridgetown *Times* as a follow-up of the Hemmingway tragedy. It bore a ten-point caption which extended across two columns; which is the equivalent in Bridgetown to full-page streamers in New York. The headlines ran:

MASTER MIND UNRAVELS MURDER MYSTERY

DEDUCING HIS WHOLE CLEW FROM STAIN ON BANK NOTE AMERICAN SHERLOCK HOLMES BRINGS MURDERER TO GALLOWS.

Professor Henry Poggioli, the celebrated American criminologist who is spending a few days in Barbados, once more exhibited his uncanny powers of deduction in bringing to justice one of the cleverest rogues and the most bloodthirsty murderer our island empire has ever known. The story of the arrest of one Charles Wilberforce reads more like a romance from the pen of A. Conan Doyle than a recountal of sober fact.

After the tragic death of Oswald Hemmingway yesterday, circumstances suggested that young Hemmingway had committed suicide after some heavy losses in stock speculation. Mr. Poggioli went to the cable office and was shown simply a five-pound note with a clay stain upon it, and by a series of the most ingenious inductions announced not only that Mr. Hemmingway was murdered, but gave a complete description and the whereabouts of the murderer.

In an interview today, Mr. Dwight, an employee of the cable company, made the following statement—

"He glanced at the stained note and immediately remarked, 'This stain was not made by Oswald Hemmingway because all bank cashiers have clean hands.' He then took the report prepared by Mr. Hodges, and proved mathematically that the person speculating in the name of Oswald Hemmingway had intended to lose five hundred pounds, no more and no less. This established the fact that some interested person was attempting to cast the shadow of suicide over young Hemmingway's death."

In an interview, Mr. Hodges of the Imperial Bank then took up the narrative so replete with intellectual marvels. Said Hodges—

"Professor Poggioli then told me that we would probably discover the amount of these speculative losses tucked away in some corner of our bank in either counterfeit bank notes or stolen currency. When I asked his reason he explained—

" 'Because some man has tried to swindle young

Oswald, who found him out after Oswald had advanced the fellow five hundred pounds in West Indian money in exchange for the vitiated currency.'

"I asked him who had done this.

"He said:

" 'Without doubt some member of the cricket team to which Oswald belonged. The culprit evidently begged young Hemmingway to postpone any legal action about the bogus money until after a certain important game of cricket which was about to be played. Through patriotism to his club, Oswald agreed to this. Then the criminal set about laying a basis of suicide with forged cablegrams upon which to murder his team-mate with impunity. The fact that Oswald was slain in the bath house immediately after the game bore out this deduction.' "

The police sergeant, Mr. O'Brien, was interviewed and furnished the next link in the processes of this master mind. Says O'Brien:

"The question then was, which player had killed Oswald Hemmingway. We suspected a young man who lives here in Bridgetown, but this wizard of crime said—

" 'No, we will allow the criminal to declare himself.'

" 'How will you accomplish that?' I asked.

" 'By pretending this member under suspicion is about to be deported, and requesting some other member of the club to accompany him from the island.'

"This was done, and Wilberforce fell into the trap instantly. The police were then about to seize the criminal when the great savant interposed:

" 'Wait,' he said, 'this fellow could hardly have stolen only five hundred pounds; that is too small an amount to justify a murder. The residue is somewhere on the island.'

" 'Where is it?' I inquired.

"For answer Professor Poggioli returned to the stained banknote. 'This is a white coral island,' he said, 'and it is not likely that blue clay can be found in many parts of it. Send this note with the clay on it to the professor of geology at Codrington College and he will inform you where such outcrops can be found.'

"This was done; a certain Scotland Yard man, who had been on trail of the missing banknotes for a number of months being the one actually to take the banknote to Professor Getty, instructor in geology in Codrington. Professor Getty located three outcrops of such clay in the island of Barbados; two were inland and one was in the cavern of the crabs near Bathsheba."

Here the Scotland Yard man, whose name is withheld by request, gave to the representative of the *Times* the following interview:

"Professor Henry Poggioli is the most remarkable investigator of crimes it has ever been my fortune to meet. We have nothing like him in Scotland Yard. When he first glimpsed me on the piazza of the Bay Mansion hotel, he observed that I was a detective by a false blond mustache I was wearing, and he immediately told me that he had a very low opinion of the ordinary detective, such as I regret to say I am. When he sent me with the stained banknote to Professor Getty and I learned that the money which I had been vainly trying to recover for the Bank of England for three months was buried in the cavern of the crabs, I said at once, 'I'll go dig it up.'

"Professor Poggioli stopped me. 'No,' he objected, 'you would have a herculean task to move all the clay in those caverns, make your brain do the work of your hands.'

" 'How?' I inquired.

" 'Let Wilberforce dig it up for you. Go and conceal yourself at the mouth of the cavern and allow Wilberforce to come and dig it up. As he comes out, leap on him and arrest him with the money in his possession.'

"This was done with the happy result of Wilberforce's capture and incarceration in Bridgetown gaol."

Captain Dorgan of the *Laughing Lass*, a Nova Scotia schooner now lying in the Carenage, assured the reporter that he had never seen a pistol shot of such expertness as Professor Poggioli. He said the American gave an amazing demonstration in the harbor and he understood that Poggioli once had been a cowboy and had fought Indians, or redskins, in the American west, near Sioux City, a village belonging to the fierce Iowa tribe.

Sir Alexander Hemmingway of Norman Hall, St. Michael Parish, the bereaved father of the murdered youth, was interviewed. He said:

"Amazing, subtle, a superman. I am thankful a divine providence directed his footsteps here to clear my son's memory."

PROFESSOR POGGIOLI read the above account thoughtfully several times. At the end of the third perusal he remembered all the above events happening practically as they were printed by the enterprising reporter of the *Times*.

When Poggioli had first returned from Bathsheba to Bay Mansion hotel, he was in a very depressed state; and was fully resolved to leave Barbados on the next steamer south. However, after reading this report, which he conceded as practically correct from start to finish, he purchased a number of copies of the paper to send home to friends, and decided to remain a few weeks longer in the pleasant, sunny island of Barbados.

SOME CRUSOES OF THE PACIFIC

by Patrick Vaux

THE PACIFIC keeps the secret of innumerable human stories of strange and exciting interest, but none of them, perhaps, is so appealing as the tale which creeps out of a solitary white man having been found living as did Crusoe on his lonely island.

On such an island there lived for a number of years Charles Robertson, a Scotsman. On a vessel approaching Palmerston Island he would shoot through the mouth of the reef in his canoe, and exchange fresh vegetables and fruit and pig for clothing, ammunition, tobacco, sugar, tea and such like stores. His house, standing in a tall grove of palms, was built of cane-work and thatched with palmetto leaves, and carpeted with grass mats. Three or four sailor chests, a rough-made table and a few stools, together with a hammock, made up all his furniture. In time, however, Robertson persuaded a trading skipper to bring him a coconut crusher and several Polynesians. He added the making of coconut oil to his island industries to such good end that, in time, through the sale of it he was able to "emigrate" to Sydney, a fairly wealthy man.

Robertson, like Robinson Crusoe, could not resist returning to the comforts of civilized life. But Thomas Holt of Robert's Island thought differently, for he clung to his little kingdom till death took him.

Holt, who was an English sailor out of Bristol—a surly "sea-lawyer"—occasioned so much disturbance in the American trading brig, on board of which he had shipped at San Francisco, that his shipmates compelled her skipper to maroon him on Robert's Island, the most northern of the Marquesas Archipelago. The captain, a good-hearted man, was reluctant to do so, yet faced with a mutiny, he felt compelled to send Holt ashore, but did not abandon him wholly unprovided.

Holt was given a frying-pan and an iron pot, an ax and a spade, a bagful of nails and a bagful of ship's biscuit, a saw and a cutlass. As the boat was shoving off, a musket and ammunition were flung on the sand beside him, by the skipper. Holt did not, as all in the boat expected, either break out into a wild mad fury of despair or set about firing on the small craft. He remained standing silently alongside the scanty supplies. When the vessel bore away on the wind, Holt had disappeared.

Seven years later, a British whaler, the *Stratford*, touched at Robert's Island, to refill her water casks and found that the island appeared to be inhabited. Search was made by means of a well trodden path which wound through a plantation of breadfruit, coconut, bananas and other fruit trees, then led into a thickly wooded part of the island toward rising ground.

At about a mile from the beach, the track opened into a clearing that was closed in on one side by a high unclimbable cliff of rock and elsewhere by an impenetrable barrier of trees and prickly undergrowth. At the end of this clearing stood a house of timber, twenty feet long by twelve wide, close to a small pool of water fed by a spring gushing out of the cliff. In the cook-house alongside it Holt was found at a meal, together with another seaman, a Swede, and a native of the Marquesas, who had thrown in their lot with him.

The Bristol man was overjoyed to see English faces again but, having told his story, he refused the offer of a passage home. Holt was "happier nor any king," and flatly refused to leave his island domain. He died a Crusoe.

Nearer South America, the Gallipagos Group have had many island hermits since first the Spaniard sighted them. In the days of buccaneering, this group was the base of more than one band of sea freebooters, and this circumstance has induced several individuals to seclude themselves there in search of hidden treasures.

Some years ago, discovery was made of a Crusoe on Chatham Island, and a tragic discovery it was. Like Robert's Island already mentioned, Chatham Island is a gem of a place for a Crusoe. It is shaped like a crab's claw, about ten miles long and some seven at its broadest, with a succession of small green hills and valleys, each with its stream. Parts of the island are thickly wooded, and other parts form charming savannahs, where browse wild cattle, goats, pigs; the descendants of stock imported by buccaneer and long-dead settler alike, and now so wild that when disturbed they dash through the thickets like deer.

There is abundance of turtle and fish of all species that are most easily caught. Wild ducks on the lagoons darken the air when they rise, so plentiful are they. Terrapin, or elephant tortoise, is abundant, and easily caught, and the hairy seal crowds the rocks and shores in all directions. The bottoms of the valleys are covered with immense beds of high, strong mint and wild thyme, sage and other herbs, and the grape grows in profusion. The climate is delightful, although, occasionally, heavy gales and hurricanes come down; but such plagues as gnats and ants are unknown. Altogether, Chatham Island of the Gallapagos is an ideal place for Crusoeing.

A schooner, belonging to a company that leased the sealing rights, arrived at this island. A doctor who was on board her, partly for his health and partly as ship's surgeon, took it into his head to walk round the island on an exploring expedition. When he was half way along the weather side, at about four miles inland he came suddenly on a space that had once been cleared. Pumpkins, melons, tobacco and sweet potatoes were now growing together in a wild state among tall weeds and suckers of young trees that started from the roots of the old ones. Close by his foot lay what once was a spade, but so rusty was it that it fell in pieces when he touched it with his foot. Near-by, in a hollow, was a stone well full of water but much overgrown with vegetation.

At the upper and rising part of the clearing the surgeon found indications of a large hut almost hidden by a clump of trees. But there was no sound of human voice here. All was still except for the cooing of the tree doves.

On nearing the habitation, he saw that it was long since the place had been tended by human hands. Wild vines had thrown so close and thick a network round it that he had to make an opening with his ax. On passing this barrier he came at once on the house, which had been built of posts of wood to the sides and front, interlaced with boughs and plastered with mud. There was only a doorway into it, but no door. Lying on the earthen floor, near a roughly made table, was the skeleton of a man, only partly covered by what had been a sheet of skins. On fingering this, it went into powder, and the bones of the skeleton fell apart at the lightest touch. On one side was an old iron pot and a frying-pan, a pile of what had been kindling wood, an ax and a saw, all rotten and rust-eaten. A tobacco-box and a rudely fashioned pipe lay on the table and a rusty gun and a cutlass in the corner. A broad shelf which had served for a bedstead was still covered with its skins.

The American saw that this unfortunate Crusoe must have been dead for many years. He searched the hut minutely, and afterward made many inquiries. But no clue was ever discovered to identify this forgotten solitary.

The
CAMP-FIRE
A Meeting-Place
for
Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SEVERAL of you have written asking me whether Mr. Surdez is French born and raised and, if so, how can he not only write so fluently in English but even show such easy mastery of American slang. After Mr. Surdez had sent us a story for the first time I asked much the same question myself.

HERE'S the query as stated by Eugene Cunningham of our writers' brigade, followed by Mr. Surdez' answer:

El Paso, Texas.

Just for satisfaction of my personal and particular curiosity—does Georges Surdez write his stuff in French and then have it translated into its colloquial English, or does he write it, as it appears, himself?

I've been reading his "Knaves of Spades" yarn and when I came to "runout powder" and other peculiarly American slang, I wondered about him.—Eugene Cunningham.

Yonkers, New York.

I write in English. French is my mother tongue, but in spite of our many disagreements, of my many offenses, English has adopted me almost completely. However, I always imagine my characters speaking French slang. And put down the equivalent in English. I don't believe that there is one slang expression in the yarn that could not be readily translated into a very similar French slang phrase.

Take the example given by Mr. Cunningham in his letter: "runout powder." Cassel's New French-English Dictionary reads:

ESCAMPETTE: n.f. scampering. *Il a pris de la poudre d' escampette:* he scampered away.

The word POUDRE means powder. Therefore the phrase cited by the Dictionary should be translated: "He has taken scampering powder." That is near enough "run out powder" to be employed.

Again, on page 36 of "K. o. S." I have *Duval* say: "I've been easy with the kid, thought he was green." In French: "*J' ai eté chic avec le gosse—j' le prenais pour un bleu.*" So, the peculiarly American slang again is very near the peculiarly French slang.

I strove to keep near the truth and at the same time to have easy flowing dialogue. I may have missed the mark once or twice. Translations are sometimes treacherous things. I have seen Hugo's famous *Clairons d' airain* transcribed as follows: "brass clarinettes."—GEORGES SURDEZ.

THIS question from Ward Robinson was addressed to all of us of Camp-Fire and of course any of us is free to speak, but in the meantime I thought Mr. Robinson would be interested in hearing from Mr. Surdez himself. And I persuaded Mr. Surdez to let me pass on to all of Camp-Fire a copy of his letter to Mr. Robinson.

Hudson, New York, July 6, 1925.

Georges Surdez' story of the African Battalion of Light Infantry in your last issue has aroused my credulity to the extent where I feel that I must ask some one if such conditions do actually exist in the aforementioned corps today.

I enjoyed Mr. Surdez' story very much and do not wish to question its veracity, but I can not understand how such conditions can exist today under the government of a nation that is supposed to be as civilized as France.

I know nothing as regards the subject myself, but my curiosity has been aroused by the vivid tale and if any one of the numerous members of Camp-Fire can enlighten me on the subject in any way, I shall be only too delighted to hear from them.—WARD ROBINSON.

IT MIGHT be well to remember that in our own country we occasionally uncover some very rotten work in prisons, reform schools, orphanages and hospitals. Also that the instances in question are not in France but in her colonies.

Yonkers, New York.

The horrors of the Military Penitentiaries have not been exaggerated in "Knaves of Spades." Any man who has ever served time in one of them would say that I brushed but a weak water-color sketch, when a raw, precise oil-painting was possible—and necessary. Some colors are too lurid to be used freely, however.

FOR example, the motive force behind practically every quarrel, every murder, among the prisoners in the North African Camps, a certain vice that flourishes there more vigorously perhaps than anywhere else, would be the cause of the greatest mental suffering to a clean man. That was one color to be left out.

Bichet was a good camp commander when compared with the average. Last year, yes, in 1924, a non-com in charge of a camp in Morocco left the prisoners without water for several days. At last, he relented, apparently. He gave them water—water salted so as to be undrinkable. Another sergeant stretched a man upon the ground and compelled the other prisoners to heap filth upon his face. The man died.

These incidents can be found in print.

A French journalist, Monsieur Albert Londres, who, by the way, tells what he sees and what he thinks regardless of what may come of it, visited the prison camps in Morocco, Algeria and Tunis last year. The resulting articles aroused great indignation in France. Better conditions were promised. But such promises had been made many times before.

In France and in Africa, I have known men who served time in the camps. I have known former sergeants. The truth of what they told was proved by Monsieur Londres' articles. Over two years ago I wrote a story, "Outside the Walls," which was published in *Adventure*. In it I touched lightly on the Bat' d'Af and the Disciplinary Section. Then, I did not dare go into details. The appearance of Monsieur Londres' articles formed for me a sort of rampart against disbelief. Result: "Knaves of Spades."

WHETHER the Knaves existed as recently as *Chaptel's* sojourn, I am not able to say. They did exist for many years. The society may have changed its name since the late nineties, but it probably flourishes even today. Another change that has come of late years in the camps is the substitution of Senegalese Tirailleurs for the Turcos. Not a change for the better. The Senegalese are brave, splendid soldiers. But they are still dangerously near the savage. I have never noticed, or heard, that they were burdened with kindness. Placing colored guards over white prisoners will ultimately be detrimental to French prestige in Black Africa.

In fairness to the sergeants, it must be admitted that the men in the camps are not the cream of the youth of France. A jovial non-com would not get along well. From punishing the guilty to harassing the innocent, when one has full power, is but a short step. Human nature has a dose of cruelty. Kindness is a development, an acquired quality, in the majority. Moreover, prison guards are not recruited among philosophers and lovers of humanity.

THE main question in your letter seems to be: Why does a highly civilized nation, France, tolerate such institutions as the Military Penitentiaries, as they are actually?

As long ago as 1845, Maurice Alhoy clamored for prison reform in France. In 1886, in 1906, protests were made against Guiana. Promises, promises—nothing done. There is hope that Monsieur Londres' articles will achieve their end. But progress is slow. It's harder to climb than to slide.—GEORGES SURDEZ.

* * *

PERHAPS the following paragraph out of a letter from E. S. Pladwell of our writers' brigade pretty well explains why the controversy over Julius Cæsar has aroused such astonishing interest among those who gather at our Camp-Fire. Not even our discussions of the Gila monster, the Custer battle, tarantulas, Billy the Kid, snakes, snake-bites and Wild Bill have stirred things up so much over a similar period of time!

Oakland, California.

I was disappointed in the last *Adventure* in not seeing another inning played in the Cæsar-Mundy-Brodeur shindy, which has given me more enjoyment than anything I've seen for a long time. It is extremely interesting, and probably the truth—as in most cases of the kind—lies somewhere in between. However, I think I can voice the real feelings of several thousand invigorated readers when I say: Attaboy, Cæsar! Attaboy, Mundy! Sic 'em! It is a lovely row and brings out points I never learned before. More power to everybody. Let 'er go!—E. S. Pladwell.

THERE have been many other comments to the same general effect. Here are several letters that have gone into the matter more fully. The first, from Elmer Davis, was not originally written for publication but is passed on with his consent:

New York City.

I don't want to take up any more space in "Camp-Fire," but may I offer a few remarks on Mundy's reply to A. D. H. Smith in your current issue, for your own ear—or Mundy's, if they're worth sending on?

GLAD to see that Mundy narrows his attack, now, and admits some good in the Empire. Nobody would deny that the Republic in its last century was pretty rotten. Where is the evidence that Cæsar, morally and politically, was worse than anybody else? Only in Suetonius and other writers who put down everything they heard, probable or improbable. Mundy seems to have some admiration for Augustus and Tiberius. Augustus was a great organizer and Tiberius was a great administrator, but the things said about them, Tiberius especially, were far worse than anything alleged against Cæsar—and the authority is just as good, or rather just as bad. If practical accomplishment exculpates Augustus, why not let it count for something with Cæsar?

His practical accomplishment was less than that of Augustus, because Cæsar had to clear the way. He smashed a rotten government and was murdered, not because he wanted to conquer Asia, but because jealous politicians and disappointed office seekers worked on that light-headed fool, Marcus Brutus. He had ended the easy pickings and they bumped him off. Cæsar worked by flashes of inspiration and Augustus by slow cautious reasoning; Cæsar bit off more than he could chew, and bit it off too soon, before the Romans had realized that the government was bound to fall to the strongest man; but, without Cæsar, Augustus could have done nothing, if only for one reason, that he owed his start entirely to the loyalty of Cæsar's army.

THESE were professional soldiers, mercenaries; they made war for what they got out of it. Yet when Cæsar was dead they stuck, not to the men who would pay them most, nor even to Mark Antony who had been Cæsar's yes man, but to Augustus, because he was Cæsar's heir and the sole proprietor, if only by adoption, of the Cæsarian name. Sounds as if there must have been something about this Cæsar that made men willing to throw their hats over the moon for him, or even his grandnephew. Augustus in his early life was about as mean and cold-blooded a scoundrel as you could imagine; he could, and did, cut his best friends' throats (literally) for political advantage. Yet he turned into a great emperor (probably due largely to his wife's influence) and even Mundy is willing to give him some credit. Give a little credit to Cæsar, then, who broke up a government of corrupt gangs, cleared away the thick-headed crooks like Pompey and the hypocritical crooks like Cicero, and at least got things into a position where something might have been done by a man who had time. He had less than two years to do it; Augustus had forty-five.

AS TO the connection between the Druids and Samothrace, Mundy's quotations don't seem convincing. Aside from Iamblichus, about a tenth-rate authority, all his ancient authors say is that the Druids, like Pythagoras, were good mathematicians and taught the immortality of the soul. Mathematics is not copyright; neither is immortality. It wasn't generally believed in antiquity, of course. But anybody who thinks realizes that this life is nothing to brag about; and from there you go on in one of two directions, according to your temperament: (a) to belief in a future life where you will get the happiness you missed in this one, or (b) a trusting confidence that when you are through here you are through for good. Each of them is the rationalization of a wish, of course, and each of them has occurred independently to any number of people. It is of course possible that the doctrines of Pythagoras, a naturalized Italian Greek, might have spread up into Gaul through the Greek settlement at Marseilles; but why not call hypothesis hypothesis?—Elmer Davis.

THIS letter deals only with Mr. Mundy's "guess" as to the evolution of the long-boat. Incidentally, to some degree it challenges Mr. Brodeur's statement, made long before the Cæsar discussion arose, that the "winged hats" of the Northmen never existed. Some one, though it may not have been Mr. Brodeur, made the point that the Northman was too wise a warrior to wear anything on his helmet that an enemy could grasp, as that offered additional mark to a weapon. I wondered about that point at the time, having more or less hazy recollections of crested helmets among various nations of various times clear up to the present, and questioning whether crest, horns, wings, etc., might not to some extent offset that disadvantage by being an additional protection. Not that I am inclined to dispute Mr. Brodeur's main point; I don't know enough to do so, for one thing.

University of Nebraska,
Omaha, Nebraska.

I have been much interested by the argument of Talbot Mundy to the effect that the Scandinavian long-boats must have been the result of a long preliminary evolution. Possibly Mr. Mundy may be interested to learn, in case he is not already aware of the fact, that there is definite archæological evidence in favor of his contention, in the form of rock carvings, quite unanimously dated back to the early bronze age—and so to a period long before Cæsar's attacks on Britain—which show formalized representations of craft which can be recognized quite clearly as crude forms of the later finished article. These rock carvings have been reproduced in a number of works on early European man. The rough pencil sketch I am enclosing is from "Der Mensch der Vorzeit," by Hugo Obermaier, p. 554. Better reproductions of similar carvings at Bohuslan, Sweden, will be found facing p. 146 of Tyler's "The New Stone Age." An interesting point in regard to the latter is that the principal figure in one of the carvings is apparently wearing a two-horned helmet—probably the basis of the "winged hats" which Camp-Fire discussion has recently relegated to the limbo of myth.—H. E. EGGERS, M.D.

THE two following letters have extra interest in that they exemplify very nicely the two opposite types of mind, the conservative and radical, standpatter and iconoclast. Both are rather more militant than we usually hear at our Camp-Fire, though one of them has some warrant in being a reply to an even more militant letter. One of the two letters is even rather abusive. Both, however, are given without modification, for in this discussion of Cæsar one of the most interesting things is the workings of the human intellect when confronted with a difference of opinion—the reactions of the two types of mind mentioned above. Needless to say, the lid is not permanently removed even in the Cæsar argument, but the argument sometimes becomes a heated one and there should be an occasional indication of that fact.

After all, it's only an argument and in the end we'll all be good friends again.

Detroit, Michigan.

Now that you have heard from all the historians about Cæsar, how about a layman and his point of view? Of course, reading Tacitus, Suetonius, etc., is all very well for those who have the time and inclination to dive in musty tomes in order to form their own opinions of past actors from what they have personally read. But, when all is said, they are only forming "their own opinion" *on what others have written;* then why not accept the consensus of opinion of hundreds if not thousands of historians as embodied in our text-books? Nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every million have not the time, inclination or facilities for reading ancient historians and must perforce depend upon the common text-books for the "meat in the nutshell."

PERSONALLY I have no sympathy nor respect for an iconoclast, nor can I place any confidence in his utterances. All he does is to pull down and destroy; he is destructive, not constructive. In the present instance, iconoclast Mundy, it is self evident, has delved into history and brought forth all the slush, mud, mire and filth that he could uncover and left out all the good that he found. It brings him a little cheap notoriety, doubtfully desirable. As my inclinations run to other subjects than history, I am perfectly willing, without *wasting my time* in reading ancient history and musty tomes, to accept the consensus of opinion of hundreds if not thousands of writers as to the estimate of Cæsar as expressed in our text-books; and likewise, I agree with them that it is much better to leave out all the filth that has been proved false and which is much better forgotten. People must be judged by the standards of their own times and, that being the case, I am much of the opinion that Cæsar was no worse than iconoclast Mundy is, and probably better; no one now can tell. My own opinion of Cæsar, any way you want to take it, sexually, morally, physically, mentally, as a general or as a statesman, writer and even as an orator, if you will, is that he is the greatest man, not of divine origin, that the world has ever produced. Iconoclast Mundy and all his writings will have been forgotten six years after he is dead, while the name of Cæsar will go thundering through illimitable spaces and his life's achievements will be the goal and the guiding star of all legitimate ambitions until the end of time.—O. A. FANWELL.

Gulfport, Mississippi.

Standing in the outer circle of the light thrown by the Camp-Fire, I have been an interested listener to the various arguments concerning Mr. Mundy's shattering of the Cæsar ideal. Most of the arguments are good; all of them are interesting. Asking to be excused for butting in, I wish to say a few words in criticism of Mr. Hathaway's letter.

LIKE Mr. Hathaway, I am not a historian. Likewise, having done my share of knocking about the world, sail and steam, I am a roughneck; but not sufficiently so to rise to such heights as to declare an earnest seeker after truth to be full of prunes—pink or otherwise—or to declare him crazy.

Nothing so angers some as the destruction of an ideal. Moreover, it is characteristic of some men to attribute insanity to those holding opinions contrary to their own. In my opinion, Mr. Hathaway's criticism of Mr. Mundy's stories is merely superficial as he apparently has failed to grasp the motivating principle of the *Tros* stories.

I OBJECT to the comparison contained in Mr. Hathaway's letter in which he asserts "To Cæsar and his men the women of Gaul and Germany were just good looking savages, to be treated as such, much as the early white men used the Indian women." His assumption that "the women haven't minded, etc.," reveals the psychology of a Prussian drill sergeant. But, does Mr. Hathaway really believe that? Does he know for a fact that the Gauls and Germans were "just good looking savages?"

I don't—although that theory was fairly well imposed upon me in my school days. I have since had other theories propounded to me which tended to throw all my preconceived notions of early Gaulish and British culture into the discard.

I have not had the opportunity for an intensive study of early British history except that to be obtained through the common channels, which seems to be based entirely upon the anti-Gaulish anti-British propaganda of the Roman writers, the official version, which, according to Shaw, is not reliable. I have, however, been fortunate in my studies of the early Irish culture, some of them in the original Gælic, which, to my mind is analogous with that of the early Britons.

The early Britons, Gauls and Irish were members of the same great Celtic family. Their languages were variants of the same Celtic tongue which survives in our day as the Cymric of Wales and the Gælic of Ireland and Scotland. Language and culture go hand in hand, so it must be presumed that the culture of these people was identical in the various countries occupied by them. Such being true, they would be far from being "just good looking savages."

I HAVE read Gibbon. I have read Wells. Likewise I have read everything I could find pertaining to the ancient civilizations, and am still hungry for more. Balancing what I have read, culled from both pro-Roman and pro-Celtic sources, I am inclined to agree with Mr. Mundy. Like him, I believe that the Roman Empire was nothing more nor less than a great robber organization. Also I have come to the realization that the disseminators of the myth describing the early Britons as a nation of skin-clad savages were merely purveyors of poppycock. Ascending to the vivid idiom of Mr. Hathaway, I'll say they were a bundle of cock-eyed liars.

This game of slandering the enemy is an old one—as old as war itself, and the arts of the propagandist have been in use a long time. Doubtless the invading Germans regarded the women of modern Gaul as "just good looking savages." The disseminators of anti-French propaganda had been busy in Germany for years before the war. The rhetorical genius of our own Mr. Creel would have instilled martial fervor in a hopeless cripple. Propaganda of the late war is not a pleasant thing to remember.

ASIDE from his reputation as a military leader there is nothing in the career of Cæsar suggesting any aim higher than his own personal advancement. His commentaries seem to have been written with an eye to political effect. Of his virtues I am skeptical. Concerning his vices, and considering the stories, mostly untrue, circulated against prominent men in our own day, I must reserve judgment. As to Cæsar's self-deification, well, I must again rise to the forcible idiom of Mr. Hathaway and declare him crazy as ——.

Why idealize Cæsar at all? We have little to learn from his example; although the writers of the text-books and the worshipers at the shrine of the established would have it otherwise. Histories of nations are merely recorded incidents in the progress of mankind, and the history of Rome is just another of those incidents. Let us, then, look with greater concern upon the history of our own country, a history of far greater moment in the general record of progress. Let our children learn to idealize Washington and Lincoln in place of Cæsar and that monster, Alexander, miscalled "the great." It is doubtful if Washington or Lincoln possessed the arts and graces of the ancient pair, but as generals and statesmen they could have made both those worthies look like a pair of wooden Indians. I realize that the comparison is unfair to the ancient gentlemen, seeing that the world has advanced a trifle since their day. Nevertheless, judging the character of all the parties concerned, I am firm in my belief that had either Washington or Lincoln lived in Cæsar's day their names would have come down to us with far greater luminosity than that of the much-advertised J. Cæsar.

But what's the use of lambasting Cæsar? After all, he was merely a cog in the Roman wheel. There were others far worse: Nero, for example.

The history of Rome is merely an illustration of the maxim: democracy creates wealth; wealth destroys democracy. Still, through the centuries the Roman model has been held up to mankind as the greatest political agent in the cause of civilization that the world has ever known. That the present-day empires are built upon the Roman plan does not obscure the fact that the Roman civilization was a civilization of wealth and power, lacking in spirituality, sustained by mass slavery, suppressing liberty and progress—a robe of dazzling splendor hiding the cruelty, avarice and stupidity beneath. And this was the Rome for which the highly individualistic Celt was asked to exchange his own patriarchal system. This was the Rome whose example is offered as an excuse for imperialistic aggression in our day. This was the Rome in whose defense Mr. Hathaway declares Mr. Mundy to be crazy and "full of prunes—pink ones!"—NEIL MARTIN.

THERE are certain things in the last part of that last letter to which I say a hearty amen.

Here is a letter centering on the extent of Rome's conquest of Britain and on the culture of the Britons of that day:

Washington, D. C.

I am very much pleased to see that Mr. Mundy has attempted to throw new light on early British history and it seems to me that his points are very well taken.

FOR one, I have never been able to swallow that story of the Roman Wall's being built to protect the poor little Roman soldiers from a handful of painted dwarfs. Not me! There was something more than a few ignorant savages on the north side of that wall!

For the benefit of your American readers who are not as familiar with England as Mr. Mundy is I suggest you call their attention to the fact that Scotland is about the size of Maine, England the size of the rest of the New England States with a little bit of New York added, and that when Rome finally conquered the island it took about forty thousand men four years to reach the Scottish border where they built the wall and apparently they never did control Wales or Scotland during the following four hundred years.

Following the above comparison the wall would have been built from, say, Lewiston, Maine, to the northern end of the Maine-New Hampshire boundary line.

That forty thousand men was nearly one soldier for each square mile of territory obtained in the four years and they must have lost a fourth of the men, because the Ninth Legion was practically wiped out at one time.

The number of soldiers in the American Revolution was but one man to two square miles.

There must have been some pretty fair scrappers and quite a little excitement in the neighborhood of the first Romans to land. I agree with Mundy. The Romans got licked the first two times and several times afterward.

BY THE way, Prof. Petrie says there was commerce between England and Egypt 1600 B.C. and that he has seen an Egyptian razor of that time found in a burial hoard in England.

I take issue with Mr. Mundy on one thing, though—I think the modern Englishman is largely Roman. Look at the Roman portrait statues and then at the Englishman of today. The Romans never were driven out of England. The type persists.—A. GRAY.

AND so, for the present, we leave the Cæsar argument, but I have a feeling that there will be more to come. Which is as it should be.

THIS comrade is right in saying that a single slip in a story can pretty well spoil it for many readers. And I'll be glad if what he says accomplishes its purpose of making all writers more careful. He gives our magazine a pretty clean slate and in the one story of ours that he mentions honors would seem to be easy between him and the author.

Mount Morris, Illinois.

I want to voice a protest which has been in the back of my head for a long time, and which pops up at each new offense.

I have just finished reading a book—a strictly Western story whose scene is laid in New Mexico in the old rootin' tootin' days when a gun was as much a part of a man's dress as his boots. The hero, upon donning his cowpuncher raiment after a five-year absence, drew his gun from the holster, and, as the story goes, "he 'broke' the gun and removed the old cartridges," etc. Now right there is my point—that word "broke." The usual gun in the West in those days was the old Colt SA army, or else the Bisley model, which is also single action. Both these guns, as well as the newer Colts, were solid frame, slide rod ejecting, and not hinged, tip-up or "break-open" like the Iver Johnson and certain S&W revolvers. Where then do these writers get the word "broke" in connection with these guns?

OF COURSE there were exceptions to the above rule; some men carried the old long-barreled tip-up S&W, some carried rebuilt Remington cap and ball six-shooters. But I am safe in saying that in any hundred gun-toters ninety of them carried Colts. If a writer is going to equip his characters with tip-up guns, he should mention the fact; but this writer (he has written lots of Western stories, too) specified several times that his hero carried two Colts.

It is true also that ninety-nine readers out of a hundred won't notice such a technical error as this; I am a crank on guns, but, by George, I'm not the only gun crank that reads this sort of stuff and shudders when a Colt is "broke" to empty or load. Writers should watch these little details, for if they are careless about their guns (or don't know), perhaps they can fall down on other things too; and it sure knocks —— out of a story for me when a writer, in depicting any certain era, equips his characters with things they shouldn't have.

Please understand that this writer is not one of *Adventure's*, but, as you say the Camp-Fire is a meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers, that is exactly the place where I want this protest printed; for there are a lot of writers who would *like* to get on your staff, and you can bet they read Camp-Fire.

As a rule your writers are pretty careful about their guns, but once in a while I read something that sounds off key to me. For instance, in the story "Terlegaphy and the Bronc," by Alan LeMay in the June 30th issue, old *Whiskers* "snatched his iron from its open holster, cocked the pistol with the same motion" etc. And . . . "*Whiskers* threw out the cylinder and snapped the ejector. Six empty shells fell into the dust." Now, *Whiskers* was a very old man, and the six-gun was also old, as stated in the story. And still the gun was the new left-hand swing style of ejecting and loading, wherein the cylinder is released by a sliding catch on the left-hand side of the frame and swings out free, after which a rod in front is pushed and all six shells come out at once. All the guns so made were double-action, yet *Whiskers* took a split second, when time meant life or death, to cock the gun; and as every one knows, cocking is unnecessary with a double-acting revolver. If the gun was old, and belonged to a very old-time cowpuncher, it would have been the old single-action, slide rod ejector model described in a foregoing paragraph.

Now I may be all wrong (we all are, quite frequently) but I would have called it a darn good story if the author had put in the simple little phrase "the gun was of late vintage, and had a swing-out cylinder which permitted all six shells to be ejected at once." It gets me, just as it would get you if an author said "the Ford was hitting perfectly on all of its six powerful cylinders," or some such absurdity.

I should like to hear what Donegan Wiggins thinks about these things; I'll bet if he were writing a story he would not have his hero "break" the old-time Colt—or any Colt, for that matter.

We are none of us perfect, but such little things as mentioned above can save an otherwise good story from the discard.

I should like very much for you to publish this letter in Camp-Fire, so that all who write stories in which *any* kind of gun figures may read and stop to think. I don't require that every one who writes must know his subject first-hand; he doesn't need to buy a whole rack of guns to study. Large sporting-goods stores in almost every city issue catalogues where guns are illustrated and described. Let the writers understand that a tip-up gun breaks, but a Colt does not. Also that a revolver is a revolver, but an automatic pistol is not. Many times (it's really common) you read in a story that "he fired five shots from his revolver . . . he slowly slumped to the ground, the empty automatic clattering on to the pavement," and similar ridiculous things.

You will at least agree with me that a writer can not be too careful in dressing up his local color, equipage, *et cetera*. This old world is full of people like myself who delight in pointing an accusing finger at a phrase or a word, and saying, "That doesn't hold water."—R. T. TILDEN.

ALAN LEMAY'S reply follows:

Aurora, Illinois.

Mr. Tilden is correct in his description of the single-action, slide rod ejector Colt which was by far the most popular arm in the West. This weapon came out in 1873 and is still being made today. You load it, one cartridge at a time, through a gate at the right-hand side, turning the cylinder by hand; and eject the shells, also one at a time, through the same gate, using the slide rod.

The left-hand swing cylinder six-gun was first made in this country by Colt in 1888. This may be called "new." The general idea was taken from some French guns, and at first it was only made in the lighter calibers—.38 and .41. It certainly never attained anything like the popularity of the other model.

MR. TILDEN is right in thinking that *Whiskers'* possession of the unpopular gun, in my story "Terlegaphy and the Bronc," needed explaining.

In *Whiskers Beck* I figured I had a man not averse to new-fangled ideas. A man who has trained horses all his life, and yet at an advanced age will try out such a stunt as "terlegaphy"—he'll try anything. So I gave him the uncommon gun. I ought to have explained it at the time—or else just have given him the gun everybody knows was all right. I sure ought. I want to thank Mr. Tilden for pointing out this weak spot.

BUT when it comes to the argument about cocking a double-action gun, I'm plumb surprised at Mr. Tilden. Maybe, as an expert, he isn't used to shooting plain run-of-the-mine guns. *I* thought everybody knew that the stiff trigger action of an ordinary double-action gun spoils a man's aim. You get around that by cocking the hammer. You let the double-action rest until sometime you may want to empty the whole works pronto, and to —— with the aim.

Ease and speed in loading is what's so good in that kind of gun. The double-action helps you if you are being charged by an army, or something, in mass formation; but it doesn't help the ordinary fellow place any particular shot, not any.

So it happens that I, for one, habitually cock the double-action gun to get a light trigger. If you are in the habit, your thumb cocks that hammer as your hand draws. And the thumb is quicker than the arm—don't let any one tell you different.

Lots of times, when not really hunting, I've worn an S&W double-action for popping at game, in case I stumbled on to something. When you're just walking along, and you come on to game that you weren't looking for, or thinking about, you must draw and throw down on it quick—or it's gone. That happens.

Just for example, one day when I was prospecting for oil in a Colombian jungle, I got a shot at a jaguar. My partner was some distance ahead, around a bend in the *arroyo* we were in, and he scared it up. The big cat crossed in front of me like a streak, at not over twenty paces. It was my first jaguar, and a complete surprize. I was plenty excited. But my thumb just naturally cocked that hammer as the S&W came out.

If you had asked me, off hand, what point in my story, "Terlegaphy and the Bronc," had some know-how in it, that went to show I might possibly have been there, I would have said the point where *Whiskers* cocked his gun.

Ask any old single-action man how long it took him to cock his gun, over and above the time it took to draw: A split second wasted? Bunk.—ALAN LEMAY.

* * *

THE, A member of our writers' brigade, didn't want his name signed to an interesting letter he'd written in reply to an inquiry from one of us. I tried to get him to change his decision and here is the letter he wrote me in reply. I hold he's all wrong on the matter of not talking to us under his own name, but, not only because of that point at issue, but also because of what he says on the Cunningham case, I'm giving you this letter as well as the original one. It's hard to get at the facts in the Cunningham case. I've talked at Camp-Fire in his favor, giving him the benefit of the doubt against the War Department and its secretive methods. Here is a presentation of the other side, and I'm glad to give it space. I get no pleasure out of proving any Department of our Government wrong. I'd rather prove it right.

If the War Department didn't cling to its old-fashioned, undemocratic, unpractical and rather ridiculous policy of secrecy where there is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by secrecy, a case in which it is right couldn't do it any harm. But so long as it refuses to give the public the facts of any case it will, whether right or wrong, necessarily be under public suspicion. If it is right in the Cunningham case, why not in the name of common sense just pass out the facts and let everybody forget it and gain added confidence in the War Department? A high school fraternity has nothing on the War Department in the way of secrecy, mystery and haughty aloofness and has a whole lot more excuse for that kind of childishness, for the War Department has plenty of matters that very decidedly give it something to be secret about without spooking around over things much better made public to the people whose business it is that the War Department is handling. There are plenty of things in the Cunningham case that need clearing up—in public.

I have your letter. I have no objection to your using my letter in "Camp-Fire," but I do not care to have my name to it, for this reason. I value very highly my standing with *Adventure*. I am young in the cause, and am well aware that a mere trifle can upset an author's standing and popularity. Witness the storm Talbot Mundy, old and established, has brought upon himself by his unusual handling of our old friend C. J. Cæsar. Personally I enjoyed the stories more than I have anything for a long time, and all my life Cæsar has been in the Front Row with me. I considered the opposition to Mr. Mundy very much uncalled for, and in some instances childlike and silly. Nevertheless to the people who did oppose him the matter was very vital and very real. One would think Cæsar was dead but yesterday, judging by the storm of protest. Mr. Mundy, a veteran of many literary wars, can afford this, perhaps, but to me it would be suicide. Therefore I would hesitate to do anything that I thought would get me in wrong with the readers of *Adventure*, upon whose good will and liking I place a very high value.

CAMP-FIRE is for all of us, and by that same token I do not think it a place for one of your writers to advertise himself, so to speak. And I am afraid one of the boys, or maybe more, would form that opinion of me. Or my views on some subject may differ so radically from his own that he would form a violent dislike to me, and consequently to anything I might have in the magazine afterward.

Often I have been tempted to join in discussions, sorely tempted at times. Regarding Gila monsters, tarantulas, snake-bites, etc., for instance. But I refrained for the reason given above. Also as to Sergt. Cunningham, of whose case I happen to know something at first hand. But my position as an officer of the Reserve Corps, and also as one of your writers, precluded my entrance into the discussion. Suppose I had said that Cunningham's incarceration was sometimes being used by unscrupulous Ex-Service men all over the country for collecting funds, ostensibly to aid Cunningham, but really for their own gain? That most of these men knew the War Dept. had gone into Cunningham's case exhaustively, and had given him as square a deal as a man ever had, under similar circumstances—open and above board? The result would have been a perfect storm of protest from Ex-Service men in general, who are for each other right or wrong; and for which I do not blame them, but rather admire them. I would not have been in a position to at once prove what I had asserted. Perhaps would not have been able to prove it at all, as many times a man will tell you something privately which he will, for matters of expediency, deny in public. Nor would I have received the thanks of the War Department, which makes it a rule never to reply to any criticism, just or unjust. A very foolish rule I think, but what you think does you very little good in military usage.

And my brother, if alive, would not thank me for bragging about an exploit of his. He was a brave, cool, quiet man; we were inordinately proud of him. But our pride and praise were for home consumption only. I am sure you will understand that feeling.

So, for these long drawn out reasons, I would prefer that my name be not used, if you decide to use the letter in "Camp-Fire."

AS A boy I tramped over the greater part of Mexico—"loose and free"—also Honduras. And to my mind it is the only way to really see and know the country—any country. Today the towns and cities of Mexico and Honduras are merely a dim memory, their names I mean, and I could not locate any of them perhaps. But the people, their characteristics, the way in which they lived, their reaction to life, the country in general, will be with me always. So when these things are discussed at Camp-Fire it is all I can do to keep out of it. I do believe, however, that you are right about unsigned letters. On the other hand I think that Camp-Fire is a poor place for the writer to express himself. It lays him open to suspicion, and like Cæsar's wife (there goes Cæsar again! I am like poor Mr. Dick and King Charles' head in "David Copperfield"), the writer should be above suspicion.—W.

YES, and some others of our writers' brigade feel the same way. But I maintain that it is essentially a selfish point of view. It's all right to be modest, but not at other people's expense. Those of our writers who do just join in with us add immeasurably not only to the interest of our meetings but to the frank good-fellowship that makes our meetings much more than the cold, formal meetings of a research society. And, after all, what do they do except just act like all the rest of us—just join in like anybody else and let it go at that?

Also, for the interest of our Camp-Fire we depend upon one another. Why should they be excused from furnishing their share of the entertainment and fellowship?

As to W's fear of making enemies, well, I think that's merely a bluff he uses to cloak his modesty. He isn't the type to turn aside for fear of making enemies. And at Camp-Fire a man will make a whole lot more friends than he will enemies by frankly stating his opinion. If we get to the place where we don't dare express our legitimate opinions on legitimate subjects in a legitimate way for fear some one may disagree and not like us, well, heaven pity us!

Anyow, here is the original letter. I let it go unsigned because it is the only answer to a direct question from one of us—one of us, by the way, who also happens to be of our writer's brigade, doesn't let it interfere in any way with his being a "regular fellow" and does not, so far as I've been able to see, make any enemies by so doing. He wanted to ask a question at Camp-Fire, so he just asked it.

As to the "Ant Bed Torture" of the Mexicans and South American Indians. This is a very real thing, but naturally not often witnessed by Americans, or even known about if possible to prevent it. When about seventeen I actually saw a man who had been staked out on an ant-bed; or rather what was left of him, which wasn't much but bones. This man, a Texan much hated and feared by the Border bandits, was captured one night by them and carried across the Border before they could be apprehended. As soon as it was known, the company of Rangers nearest the point where they were supposed to have crossed the Rio Grande went after them. My brother belonged to this company and, as I was visiting him at the time, I went along. We crossed the river, "unofficially" of course, which was often done in those days, and after a day and night of hard riding came to the camp where the bandits had staked out poor old Bill Duggan. There was nothing left. The ants had picked him clean. We put the bones in a sack, and an old Ranger and myself returned to Texas with them. The rest of the company went on and took a terrible toll for the death of Duggan, which of course was never officially reported. In fact it seemed that the only way the Border people could live in any peace at all, at that time, was to fight their own battles. Washington cared little about them, and usually made a mess of things when they did take a hand. So Texas and New Mexico learned by bitter experience that it was best to do their own fighting.

FROM all that I have been able to learn, a man staked out on an ant-bed will live in the greatest conceivable agony, for about one hour. But if he is not rescued within twenty minutes or half an hour his case is hopeless. It takes about that long for the ants to penetrate to the brain, *via* the nose. These ants are aboutone-half an inch long, great husky red fellows that build big beds that can be seen at a considerable distance. They have a wonderful social system, and are great warriors. In fact they are the Romans of the ant world. (Please don't tell Talbot Mundy! I have always had the greatest respect for these red ants, and I don't want to lose it, as I have my admiration for the old Romans, after reading Mr. Mundy's Julius Cæsar stories.)

To my mind there is no greater horror than being staked out on an ant-bed. It is the refinement of torture. Historically it came down from the old Incas, as far as I know. The mere hint of it, the smallests threat, will often cause a man to confess to a crime that he has not committed; if he is really convinced that this hideous third degree is to be used on him if he does not. Not only is the gnawing of the ants a ceaseless agony, above and beyond any pain, when they strike the nerves; but the ants secrete and throw off, when they are at work, a form of formic acid that sets up an intolerable burning. One solitary bite will demonstrate this. Multiply it by ten thousand! Your imagination will supply all details that are necessary.

THE Southern Mexicans have another pleasant little diversion, that they usually practice on unfaithful wives. In the waters of stagnant ponds and their slow flowing creeks they have a leech that is known locally as "Kandiros." Its scientific name I do not know.

This agreeable aquatic gentleman has a dorsal fin, and the habit of penetrating body cavities. Once inside, his dorsal fin acts just as a barbed arrow would do; and he can be dislodged only by cutting. Left alone, he lays a mass of eggs and these soon become a writhing mass of grubs, whose every movement is an agony to the miserable host.

IF FRIEND husband has reason to doubt his spouse, he drags her down to the creek, "hog ties" her and sits her in the water for an hour or so. The gentle Kandiros does the rest. It is then only a question of time after this bath until the man is a widower; and while he is waiting he also has the pleasure of witnessing agonized writhings that would turn a rack and thumb screw artist green with envy. And, as strange as it may seem, the poor woman usually dies with her death a profound mystery to all but the initiated. They seldom, if ever, accuse their husbands. Can you beat it?

YET for all of this the common people of Mexico, when they really know you, and have therefore also learned to trust you, are a fine and hospitable people. Ready to go to any extent for a friend. If one remembers that since America was discovered they have been exploited, tortured and betrayed, the peculiar psychology of the people can be better understood. What Cæsar did to the Britons and the Gauls was a moonlight picnic to what the Christian Spaniards did to the Mexicans. Much of what they really did has been suppressed, but what is known is sufficient. Therefore I do not shed a great many tears when I read about one of the old Cortez land pirates being introduced to an ant-bed. I just somehow can't get worked up over it.—W.

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Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

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A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocnea-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. Islands Part 3 Cuba
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

7. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

8. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Boite No. 167, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

9. ★ Australia and Tasmania
PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Road, Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

11. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

12. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

13. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*

14. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

17. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.* Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

18. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

19. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

20. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

21. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

22. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

23. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

24. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

27. Turkey
J. F. EDWARDS, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

30. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

33. Finland, Lapland and Russia
ALEKO E. LILIUS, care *Adventure.* History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.

34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
CAPT. FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure.* History, politics, customs languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, out-door life.

35. ✠ Great Britain
THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

36. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

37. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 21 Claremont Ave., New York City. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

38. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.* Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

39. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel; languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

40. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahulla, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern
W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 1121 Columbia Rd., Washington, D. C. Federal Territory of Quinta Roo, Yucatan, Campeche. Travel, geography, business conditions, exploration, inhabitants, history and customs.

43. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

45. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

46. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

47. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

48. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

49. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

50. Canada Part 8 Newfoundland
C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

51. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island
FRED L. BOWDEN, 312 High Street, Newark, N. J. Lumbering, hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

52. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 6720 Leland Way, Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

53. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Editor to be appointed. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section* 64.)

64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes
H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure*. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 6. Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot river. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72, Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., and Mass.
Howard R. Voight, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
(Editor to be appointed.) Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

74, Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus; invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, care of *Adventure*.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr.; 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

CAPT. FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure. United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

LIEUT. FRANCIS V. GREENE, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 1244¼ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work; duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

DR. G. K. NOBLE, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write LAURENCE JORDAN, care *Adventure.*

For **general information on U. S. and its possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept., of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State**, FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care of *Adventure.*

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

Repair Shops in Panama

JOBS for mechanics.

Request:—"Will you please give me a general idea of the repair shops of the Panama Railroad. Do they do any work other than railroad? Is there a foundry?"—CHAS. BIRKENMEYER, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—Under an act of Congress approved Aug. 24th, 1912, the construction of permanent shops for the repair of marine, canal, and railroad equipment was authorized. The repair shops are built at Balboa within the area of the dry dock and repair wharves. They are built to do repair work for the operating machinery of the canal locks, for the bridging and towing fleet, the Panama Railroad, the canal fortifications, the United States Navy, commercial shipping, and local manufacturing and contracting companies. The site on which these buildings have been constructed is 36 acres in extent. The shop buildings are grouped with a view of placing each shop as near as possible to the point where its particular type will be required. The buildings all have overhead crane runway extensions on each end, so arranged that material can be placed within reach of locomotive cranes on the dry-dock wall, or wharves, or can be handled to and from cars on the double tracks that pass under them.

There are 16 principal buildings, the main columns of which carry loads as great as 173 tons. The 12 smaller buildings have lighter column loads. Extra precautions were taken in the construction of the foundations, and under many of the heavy machines, and under the main columns of the roundhouses and foundations of the turntables, pipe piles filled with concrete and reinforced concrete piles were used.

The machinery in the shops is all electrically operated except such machines as hammers, etc., which are not adapted to this type of drive. The current used is 3 phase, 25 cycle, and is delivered to the shops at 2,200. volts; the shop motors are operated at 220. volts.

Four types of motors were adopted for power drives—commutating-pole direct current, slip-ring induction motors, squirrel-cage induction motors, and synchronous motors. The supply for motors is 220. volts for both the direct and alternating current, the latter by 3 phase, 25 cycles.

The direct-current motors drive lathes, planers, boring-machines, and other tools where a variable tool speed is desired. Their speed ranges from 350 to 1,400 revolutions per minute; 375 to 1,125; 375

to 1,500; 450 to 1,800; and 500 to 1,500. The slipring, polar-wound induction motors drive machines that require a high starting torque or that are necessarily reversible. The squirrel-cage induction motors are used for all group drives and on all constant-speed machines. The synchronous motors are used for driving direct-current generators and air compressers.

Building No. 1 contains the machine shop, erecting shop, and tool department. For the general overhauling and repairs on locomotives, steam shovels, and similar equipment, there are four engine-pits, one of them a drop-pit. The shop is equipped with a 60-ton electric overhead driving crane.

Building No. 2 contains the forge shop, which is supplied with a 25-ton electric overhead driving crane. The machinery in this building consists of pipe machines, hammers, jib cranes, forges, and the equipment necessary for tinsmiths and coppersmiths to ply their trades. All forges and furnaces in this building burn crude oil.

The foundry in building No. 12 is equipped to handle almost any size of casting.

The shops repair, on an average, 2,654 locomotives and approximately 11,000 cars per year. These repairs include both light running and heavy repairs on all classes of cars and on locomotives in passenger, freight, and yard service.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

La Reunion

A FRENCH Island in the Indian Ocean.

Request:—"I have heard of the Island of La Reunion, in the Indian Ocean, belonging to the French.

I would like to know how to get there with the least expense from San Francisco.

What boats land there and what American companies are there?

And what are the living conditions?

I have heard that diseases are there aplenty, but that doesn't scare me none.

Thanking you in advance, I am"—ARTHUR DUHEM, Oroville, Cal.

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—So far as I know, the only way to get to Reunion is by way of France or England. And I do not think there are any American companies there. It is French, and about 80 per cent. of the people are colored.

If "plenty of tropical diseases don't scare you none," you must either have been crossed in love or knocked on the skull pretty hard. No man who has experienced places reeking with disease in the tropics ever brags about the experience.

But you may be immune. Lord knows. And perhaps you may have reasons for wishing to go there. Reunion is not so bad. But the very best advice I can give you is, send one dollar to the H. O. Office U. S. Navy, Washington, D. C., asking for their publication 161, South Indian Ocean Pilot, which in chapter IV gives a full description of the island among others: far more than I can tell you in a letter. Tells you how to get there, too. As for trade or business possibilities, write to your Department of Commerce, at Washington. Luck to you.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

State Police

PENNSYLVANIA has one of the best systems.

Request:—"Being a constant reader of the *Adventure* Magazine I have followed up the Camp-Fire talks for some several years now. And, just recently noticing your name mentioned as being an authority on the subject of State Police I am taking the liberty of writing you for such information as you care to give me.

To be perfectly frank with you, I am seeking a position with some good Police organization. I am a young man of twenty-three summers, well above the average, both in size and strength. Have followed up athletics during my service, have a pet hobby of weight lifting and work with the barbells. Have four years' experience behind me as a non-commissioned officer of Marines during which time I have held various assignments of responsibility.

Have three years of high school training, also two years of studies since entering the Marine Corps. That I believe would qualify me as being mentally fit, insofar as the educational qualifications are concerned.

Now to business, I will sincerely appreciate, Mr. Bent, any information as to any State Police organization here in the Northwest. Insofar as I know the State of Washington has no such organization. But as to the neighboring states, I do not know. What and where is the headquarters of the nearest State Police outfit, and what would be the procedure in applying for a position? Does one have to take a civil service examination? And would the fact that I hold qualifications as *Expert* with the rifle and pistol be of any help to me in the business?

Will thank you in advance for such information as you care to give me concerning the above."—HOLWAY D. A. WATTS, Puget Sound, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. Bent:—I'm afraid that you will have to travel quite a ways before coming to a state where there is a State Police Force. They seem to be rather short on them in the West.

The nearest one to you is Michigan, and they require that a man be at least 24—and you say you are 23.

A number of Western states have what is called a State Sheriff with deputies under him. I take it, however, that you want a regular, uniformed force, organized along military lines.

As I said before, Michigan is the nearest to you. The next best is Indiana—whose force only enforces the motor laws. The next would be the Pennsylvania State Police.

There you have a crack organization and one of the oldest in the country—they were organized in 1905.

Enlistment requirements are: Between 21 and 40 years old; pass physical and mental examinations; at least 5 feet 6 inches tall, without shoes; show honorable discharge from Army, Navy, or Marine Corps; present 3 character references from home town; and be able to ride.

After passing the first two examinations, the recruit is assigned to the State Police Training School. Here he gets training in Cavalry Drill; Horsemanship, including Stable Hygiene and Care of the Horse; Practical Self Defense; Marksmanship; Criminal Law; Fish, Game, and Forestry Law; Criminal Procedure; Investigation of Crimes; Methods of Handling Individuals, Crowds and Mobs; Geography, particularly of Pennsylvania; and Civil Government. After this training he is given a final examination in which he must rate at least 70 per cent. in each subject. All men in Barracks attend Troop Schools regardless of length of service.

Pay is $1200 a year with additional pay of $60 a year for each year of service up to five years. Men furnish their own mess, but the State furnishes uniform and equipment.

Your Expert Marksmanship qualifications will certainly come in handy, although they won't win a place on the force nor a promotion after you get there. That is entirely up to the ability of the individual.

The State Police is not under the Civil Service. A trooper enlists for two years. However, he has the privilege of resigning before his enlistment is up if he so desires, although this practice is greatly discouraged.

To land a place on the force of any State Police, and to win promotion afterwards, a man must "have the goods." The man who gets there is the pick of the lot.

If you want to enlist in Pennsylvania, write the Superintendent, State Police, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for enlistment application blank.

If there is any further information you want about the Police don't hesitate to call on me. Sorry I couldn't provide you with a force farther west, but the East seems to be a little farther advanced in this respect—maybe we are a tougher lot and need them more.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Finnish Copper

DISCOVERED by purely scientific principles.

Request:—"I take the opportunity offered by '*Ask Adventure*' in hopes that you may enlighten me in regards to the Outokumpu copper deposits of Finland.

I would like to know the following:

1. The location of Outokumpu?
2. The character of the ore?
3. What progress the Finnish Government has made in exploiting the deposits?
4. Can the ore be concentrated by flotation?
5. Are there any openings for concentration engineers?
6. What technical Finnish publications are there dealing with the Outokumpu deposits?

Thanking you in advance, I am."—W. A. KAATTARI, Tooele, Utah.

Reply, by Mr. Lilius:—Regarding the Outokumpu Copper Deposits of Finland, I give you the following information:

The discovery of this deposit was made in 1909 between the towns of Joensuu and Kuopio, at a distance of only ten miles from Lake Saima, which is connected with the sea by canal.

The way in which the ore was discovered is interesting as an example of prospecting done on purely scientific principles. A boulder of ore has been found during the digging of a canal in the Saima region, and an official of the Geological Survey, Mr. O. Trustedt, then traced this to the spot, 30 miles distant, where it had been detached from the solid rock during the glacial period. The ore body was finally located by the aid of diamond drilling.

This ore body has a thickness of 7-28 ft. and a length of one English mile. Its depth has not yet been determined, but at 600 ft. there is still no marked difference in the thickness and character of the ore, which consists of iron and copper pyrites, with some zincblende. The copper contents is 4.5% and the zinc 1.5%.

The "ore in sight" may be estimated at 8,000,000 metric tons, but under the very probable assumption, that it goes still deeper, the whole body of ore may be much greater, probably not very much inferior to the famous copper ore body of Falun, in Sweden, which was in former centuries, especially during that country's continental wars, one of the most important sources of revenue of the Kingdom of Sweden. But while the ore body of Falun was very irregular in form and content, that at Outokumpu is in the main as regular as a coal seam and easily stoped.

The "ore in sight" contains 300,000 tons of copper with a gross value of Fmk. 3,600,000,000 or nearly £20,000,000*. But as already stated, this is the minimum, and double or three times as much is even possible. The zinc content may also be utilized. The sulphur was exploited during the war and was of great value to the pulp and paper mills at a time when foreign sulphur was not available. At the present prices of American sulphur, however, it is a difficult proposition to utilize the sulphur of the Outokumpu pyrites with advantage, as with sulphur content is only 28%.

The experimental plant which has been at work since 1914, using Hybinette's electrolytic method (slightly modified), has proved with certainty that exploitation would yield a considerable gain even at the present abnormally low price of copper.

It would, however, be necessary to use water power instead of wood fuel for generating electricity, and to enlarge the present works considerably. If bigger works were erected it would probably be most advantageous to build them either on the southern shore of Lake Saima near the power-generating works on the Imatra rapids, or else by the sea.

Even working on a moderate scale, it would be possible to produce at least 6,000 tons of copper a year, with a value of Fmk. 72,000,000 (2 million dollars), a sum by no means negligible in the yearly balance of trade.

It seems astonishing that this important national resource has not yet been more fully utilized. The reasons are manifold, most of them conneced with the uncertain conditions prevailing during and after the war.

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*$100,000,000.

The ore body was owned by two partners, half by the State, as discovered and the other half by the firm of Hackman & Co., which owned the fields where the ore was found. In the year 1917 the mine was leased to a Norwegian company formed by Mr. Hybinette. He and his partners, who during the war had been very successfully carrying on nickel works in Norway, had later engaged in the organization of the British-Canadian Mining Corporation, with the purpose of producing nickel and copper in Canada on a very large scale. In comparison with this gigantic enterprise, which met with considerable difficulties owing to the sudden drop of metal prices at the end of the war, Outokumpu could only be given divided attention. The result was that after a certain lapse of time the lease automatically expired, and the owners took charge of the mine and the experimental works.

The present works have to pay a rather big interest on the capital hitherto spent, and rent to the owners, and these items, together with the costs of administration, make the expenses too heavy for works of the existing size.

The business activities in which the Finnish Government engaged after the end of the war, by purchasing the majority of the shares in certain big enterprises, have not in general been a financial success, and consequently the current of public opinion is against further engagement in business undertakings.

There are, however, projects on foot for running the Outokumpu works in connection with the State-owned sulphuric acid plants, which will in any case be continued because of their importance for military purposes.

In any case it seems obvious that it is only a matter of time until the Outokumpu mine, worked by either Finnish or foreign capital, will be the basis of a considerable industry.

It seems to be the general opinion among experts with a knowledge of the copper industry that the present depression cannot last very long. The surplus of copper existing in the United States at the time of the armistice and the stores of scrap copper produced from munition materials are now practically exhausted. The prospective development of the electric power will increase the demand for copper, and Germany will again become a large consumer, when the indemnity questions have been settled. A rise of at least 20% in copper prices seems likely. The known deposits of copper ore are rather limited, and a shortage of that metal in 15 or 20 years' time seems very probable.

Thus a copper ore body as big as that at Outokumpu is in any case a very valuable national asset.

New discoveries of similar ore bodies seem not impossible. Other boulders of rich copper ore, whose origin has not yet been detected, indicate the existence of hitherto unknown resources.

Replying to your question No. 4—Can the ore be concentrated by flotation? I am able to reply in the affirmative.

Question No. 5—Are there any openings for concentration engineers?

I am of the honest opinion that if you are not a Finnish citizen, you will hardly have a chance, but if you are a Finnish citizen, I would suggest that you write to Prof. J. J. Sederholm, Director of Geological Survey of Finland, and he will undoubtedly be able to give you any further information you may desire.

Zulus

AHOW a small and insignificant tribe became the most powerful nation in South Africa through the genius of one man.

Request:—"I have read various books of those written by Sir Rider Haggard, and in all of them I have found reference to the Zulu impis. Could you tell me about their organization and armament? Also, what weapons did the Zulu depend on most for fighting and what ones for killing game, etc.? What were the extents of the lands controlled by the Zulus in the height of their power?"—FRED BROWN, N. Y. C.

Reply, by Capt. Franklin:—The name "Zulu," which means "sky" was, not further back than a hundred years, confined to a small and insignificant tribe under the chieftainship of one Senzangakoni, occupying that portion of a White Umfolozi valley which falls between the Mahlabatina Magistracy on the north and that of Melmoth on the south. It was owing to the brilliant genius of Tshaka, a son of Senzangakoni, that the numerous tribes at that time living in what is now known as Zululand were, by degrees, and yet within a dozen years, formed into a single, compact nation, by far the most powerful in South Africa. Because Tshaka belonged to the Zulu tribe—then, as it happened, tributary to the more powerful one of Mtetwa, occupying territory on the northeast coast of Zululand—the great nation he afterwards created came to be known as that of the Zulus.

The subsequent renown of the people excited public curiosity as to the origin of the tribe in question. Endeavors were accordingly made to trace its history further back than was customary even with larger tribes, with the result that the name was found to be derived from one Zulu, son of a certain Malandela, who flourished in Zululand probably during the sixteenth century.

This son is said to have quarreled with his elder brother Qwabe, who took exception to the former being presented by his mother with a certain white ox, with the result that Zulu left with his followers to occupy the White Umfolozi valley, whilst Qwabe went to live nearer the coast on the south side of the Umhlatuze River and in what is now known as Eshowe district.

It was with the help of the chief of the Mtetwa tribe that Tshaka, who was not the proper heir, became chief of the Zulu tribe. No sooner did he become chief than he began to build up an extraordinary military organization, and to attempt what had never been attempted before, namely, to fuse the various tribes into a nation.

BEFORE, however, the Zulu nation came into existence, there occurred an incident of a comparatively trifling nature which, at a later time, was destined to exert an enormous influence on the political and social life of the people. Briefly, this is what happened: A young man, suspected of his father (the chief of a tribe) of plotting with others against him, was ordered to be put to death. Those alleged to be concerned with him were summarily dispatched, whilst he, thanks to his extraordinary smartness and agility, succeeding in jumping the outer fence of the kraal and escaping with a wound in his side. He subsequently strayed into far-off parts, dwelt for a time with this chief and with that, afraid lest his father's emissaries should find him, and eventually came into contact with some European or Europeans.

One theory is he traveled as far as Cape Town and there had opportunities of observing the way in which British troops were trained. Another, and more plausible one, is that he came across an European, possibly Dr. Dowan—member of an exploring expedition under a Lieut. Donovan, that left Cape Town for the north in 1809—and from him acquired a knowledge of the manner in which Europeans recruited and organized their troops.

Whichever of these theories is the correct one, it is certain he came into touch with European ideas, for after wandering about for some years, he, on hearing of his father's death, decided to return home and by strategy to gain the position of chief in succession of his father. He went back mounted on a horse and armed with a gun, neither such animal nor such weapon ever having been seen in Zululand. The name of the wanderer was Godongwana, subsequently changed by himself to Dingiswayo (meaning "he who was made to wander"), and the tribe was that of Mtetwa—the one to which reference has already been made.

The rest is soon told. Owing to neither horse nor gun being known in Zululand, Godongwana was almost immediately regarded by the extremely superstitious folk of those days as the "king of witch-doctors" and he managed, with a little scheming, to depose his younger brother and get himself appointed in his place, the scar in his side clearly proving his identity.

Dingiswayo began at once to institute reforms, the chief one being the reconstruction of the tribal army on lines possibly suggested by the hypothetical Englishman. He attacked the surrounding independent tribes one after the other. He was later on joined by Tshaka (then quite a young man), who, for various reasons, was unable to live in his father's tribe. Tshaka repeatedly distinguished himself during the wars then going on, and Dingiswayo was so pleased with his behavior that, on Senzangakoni's death, he assisted him to become chief of the Zulu tribe. Tshaka lost no time in building up a little force of his own on the lines recently introduced by Dingiswayo.

He, too, began to attack and conquer neighboring tribes, and eventually grew to be so powerful that, after Dingiswayo's death, he became paramount chief of Zululand, Natal, as well as over large parts of the Cape Colony and the Transvaal. His army rapidly swelled to formidable proportions—it numbered anything between 50,000 and 100,000 and was victorious wherever it went. It became probably the most terrible and powerful engine of war that had ever existed in this part of the world. The people became enthusiastic over everything military, whilst the warriors, intoxicated with their perpetual successes and the fruits thereof, became more daring and courageous, until every native race of South Africa stood aghast at the ruin that had occurred, and which appeared still to be in store.

The main end Tshaka set before himself was to create a nation and to govern his creature by means of an army established to extend his sway north, south and west. This army he strove to make as effective as possible. He arranged his men into regiments according to age, caused each regiment to wear a distinguishing uniform, required every man to use but one (a stabbing) assegai, and they were to be ready to mobolize in a day or a night, and proceed anywhere at the shortest notice. Efficiency and mobility were the primary objects in view.

Dingiswayo had previously carried his reforms a long way, but the ferocious and insatiable Tshaka, profiting by "The Wanderer's" experiences among strange people, soon surpassed anything that had ever been done in the organization and training of a native army. His force became like a swarm of bees (his last regiment, by the way, was called "The Bees"), able to mass and organize at once, as if automatically, and move swiftly to overwhelm and annihilate wherever the tyrant chose.

It was when at the very height of his power that Tshaka and his nation came, for the first time, into direct and continuous contact with European ideas, through the arrival at Port Natal of a little band of settlers, headed by Farwell and Fynn. Fynn was the first to arrive, and did so in May, 1824. He immediately got into touch with the great Zulu king and became his and his people's life-long friend. The white people were soon known far and wide as "the king's friends," and this friendliness has, I believe, continued down to the present day, the Zulu War and all other troubles notwithstanding.

Connected with Tshaka's military system, and an essential therein, was his remarkable practice of absolutely controlling the marriage of every man and woman in the country. He went further and prohibited on pain of instant death all intercourse between young men and girls. It is apparent that, had he not prescribed and enforced stringent rules as to marriage, and forbidden the practice of certain loose though long-standing habits, he could never had made the army as mobile and as amenable to discipline as it was. The rapidity of his operations in every direction against the enemy, or what he was pleased to call his enemy, was amazing. Nothing like it was known before or since.

Tshaka was assassinated in 1828. Having no issue, he was succeeded by his brother Dingana who, after an inglorious reign and after being badly defeated by the Boers with the assistance of Mpande, was put to death by the Swazis on the Ubombo range early in 1840. Mpande, another brother of Tshaka, succeeded. He had escaped being killed by Dingana (who, besides being treacherous, set about to murder his brothers) as he was supposed to be "rather a fool." He died a natural death in 1873, his son, though not his rightful heir, Catshwayo, then becoming king. During Catshwayo's reign occurred the Zulu War of 1879, followed by the collapse of the Zulu power. Since Catshwayo's death in 1884, Dinuzulu has been regarded by some as the leading representative of the Zulu royal house, whilst others hold that Manzolwandhle's claims to that distinction are stronger.

Having seen something of the early history of the Zulus, let us now pass on to consider a few of their more important beliefs, customs and other characteristics.

They believe that the earth, moon, sun, stars, and indeed everything, was created by a Supreme Being called Mvelingqangi, i. e., "The First Appearer," though there seems to be no idea as to within what period all these things were made.

There is a tradition to the effect that all people originally came from a single pair, and this pair sprang from a bed of reeds, but where such bed is to be found tradition does not say. At the same time, if pressed, a Zulu would probably locate it somewhere in the north, seeing a deep-rooted tradition of their having descended from that direction is widely prevalent, not only among them, but other allied peoples like the Basutos, Xosas, Swazis, and Tongas. A certain fairly well-defined section declares that its ancestors "rolled down from the north in a large basket (*isilulu*)."

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Naval Reserve Officers

HOW they are appointed.

Request:—"I would like to have some information concerning the department that you handle for *Adventure.*

What is the proper procedure to follow to gain a commission as a Reserve officer? I would like to receive a commission in either the Reserve or State militia.

I am not a 'boot,' but served at sea during the war in the first cruiser patrol squadron which was convoy escort. I was paid off from the destroyer *Ballard* as coxswain with the offer of second-class boatswain's mate for shipping over. I was slated for a class on the *Charleston* to study for a commission but was dropped for getting on report. I have the equivalent of a college education and I am proficient in mathematics, including plane and spherical trigonometry and the calculus.

I thought I had best give you the above information as you may be able to give me some pointers and also so that you will know that I am not a landsman.

Your answer will be appreciated very much. Enclosed please find self-addressed envelope and postage."—C. M. O'Donohoe, Rochester, N. Y.

Reply, by Lt. Greene:—You will find great difficulty in time of peace in getting a commission as an officer in the Reserve; the Naval Militia is about the same. Unless it is as a Supply Officer you served in the Navy during the war, you will know what this is. The usual way of obtaining officers in time of peace is by promoting men of the Reserve that can qualify for the positions. In time of war, of course, on account of the demand, they get them in all sorts of ways. Those that are directly commissioned, without preliminary training during war, are those of the merchant marine that hold licenses and have experience, the rest have to go through a course of training. These last do not amount to much anyway as a rule, a sea officer cannot be made in three months' training or so.

Here are some regulations concerning this:

Sect. 2. Organization.

112. Whenever the number of officers in any corps in a State falls below the authorized quota, the Bureau of Navigation will issue the necessary instructions for filling the vacancies upon the request of the commandant.

Sect. 1. Officers.

2. If physically qualified, the following are eligible for enrollment in the Naval Reserve, (a) Ex-temporary officers of the Navy; (b) Civilians qualified for duty in Staff Corps; but no civilian with no previous naval or reserve experience shall be enrolled as an officer in the Supply Corps. All line and Supply Corps officers in this class, except as noted under article 202 (2a) (above) *will be obtained by promotion from qualified enlisted (enrolled) men.*

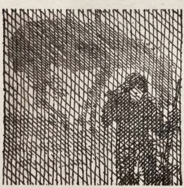
The way to get a commission in these outfits is, enlist with what rating you can get and work up to an officer's billet.

To get information as to vacancies, write for the Reserve: Commandant, Third Naval District, South and Whitehall Streets, New York, N. Y. For Naval Militia: Commanding Officer Naval Militia, Albany, N. Y., or get in touch with any local reserve or militia officer that may be in your own town.

The Reserve was entirely reorganized July 1, 1925, and there is some new dope that the department has not put out so far.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address Joseph Cox, *Adventure*, New York.



LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

(See next page.)

STEARN, NOEL H.: Please get in touch with the editor of *Adventure* in regard to your manuscript "The File Clerk."

THOMAS, WILLIAM, ISABELE, FRED, ARTHUR and FRANK. Last heard of in 1920 at Bruno, Canada. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. J. E. Thomas, General Delivery, Ventura, Calif.

MITCHELL, WILLIAM K.; SANBORN; BURKE et al or any member of the old staff Non-Commissioned Officers' Club of Coblenz. Would be tickled to hear from any of you.—Address T. H. Winters, 316 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass.

BOHANNAN, DELBERT. Last heard of December 20, 1921, when he was living at 142 West St., New York City, at that time he was employed by the Steel Construction Company. He was born in California 28 years ago, height 5 feet 9 inches, weight about 160 lbs., very fair complexion, sandy hair and brown eyes. He is a high school graduate, a great reader. Any information will be appreciated by his father.—Address Colonel Edward J. Parker, The Salvation Army, 120-130 W. 14th St., N. Y. C.

WOULD like to get in touch with "Snit" McLaughlin, last heard of in the Peace River district of Canada, Formerly of Grand Forks, North Dakota and Battery C. 58th Arty., C. A. C., A. E. F. and the following men also from the same outfit. James Moses, last heard of in Aurora, Ill., Joe Vreo, Indianapolis, Ind., Jack Spillman, Oklahoma City, Okla., MacLeod, Providence, Rhode Island. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Parker J. Butler, care of Igenio Porvenir, C. Por A., San Pedro De Macoris, Republica Dominicana.

THE following have been inquired for in either the November 10 or November 30, 1925, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ANDREWS, John Oates; Best, Christine and Catharine; Bon, Walter C.; Bridges, Alfred Renton; Brigham, Franklin Wilson; Cohen, Mike; Day, Herbert; Erwin, George Richard: Garland, John; Hale, Edna; Hardy, Constance; Hoag, H.; Jeffers, Major Leon; Lalla, George; Lucas, Arthur; McCarthy, Joseph A.; Meacham, John L.; Muir, Will Carter; Pugh, William Alonza; Pugh, James W.; Rivet, Fred; Rosenfeld, Max; Shakelford, Emliss; Stevenson, Willis B.; St. John, Gaylord or Lester; Wieritsch, William: Williams, Jonathan Robertson.

MISCELLANEOUS: Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Stewart W. Cairncorss or Frank Veidiglione, who were soldiers in the Ordnance Dept. of Raritan Arsenal, Metuchen, New Jersey in 1920; A. R. P. Would like to hear from any member of the old 21st Balloon Co. from the date of 1919 to 1922;

McLAUGHLIN, FRANCIS. Have New York State bonus check and other mail for you. Please call or write.—Address Charlotte.

BACON, LEO. Formerly an actor at Central Falls, Rhode Island, playing the part in Dan McGrew, Paul and Virginia, in 1910 with Joseph Curry, William Lienster and Sydney Smith. Any information will be appreciated.—Address William Bloomer, care of American Chimney Co., 747 Pine St., Central Falls, Rhode Island.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

STRANGE FELLERS ***Alan LeMay***
He drifted in with the black horse.

WHITE FALCON Conclusion ***Harold Lamb***
Once more — the Don.

OUT OF THE FOG ***Captain Dingle***
Whalemen homeward bound.

TIME ***W. A. MacDonald***
Speed was the thing!

THE PRIVILEGE OF THE GODS ***Arthur H. Little***
Diving takes courage.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by W. C. Tuttle, Thomson Burtis, L. Patrick Greene, Georges Surdez, Leslie McFarlane, T. S. Stribling, Norman Springer, Harold Lamb and Gordon MacCreagh; and short stories by Albert Richard Wetjen, F. St. Mars, Post Sargent, Kenneth Malcolm Murray, Don Cameron Shafer, Raymond S. Spears, Captain Dingle, Robert Carse, J. D. Newsom, Bill Adams, Thomas Harvey Gill, Fiswoode Tarleton and others; stories of daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

“The Man They Hanged”

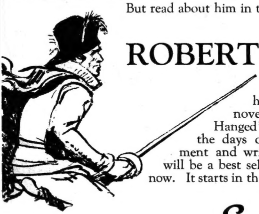
Who Was He?

They called him a bloody pirate—murderer—cutthroat—thief. They accused him of every crime they could invent. They blackened his name, disgraced his family . . . Before a false court he was tried. Perjured witnesses swore against him. A craven judge denied him justice. He was convicted, sentenced and hanged—to save the very nobles he had served, innocently, honestly and too trustingly.

Who was he?—this gallant, fearless gentleman, this splendid sea captain? His name was Captain William Kidd, and he . . .

But read about him in the thrilling story, “The Man They Hanged.”

It’s by



ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

The prince of story tellers. Mr. Chambers has written a great number of the most popular novels ever penned in English. “The Man They Hanged” is undoubtedly his greatest. It’s a tale of the days of Old New York. Crowded with excitement and written in a glowing, colorful way, this story will be a best seller when published in book form. Read it now. It starts in the November number of *Everybody’s* Magazine.

This is only one feature of **Everybody’s** *Magazine* *There are—*

Stories of Real Life

Stories of achievement, happiness, and success—of men and women who are doing worth-while things. Each story is the actual narrative of some person and what he has done. It mirrors your own hopes and ambitions, your failures and trials—as experienced by others. You get an insight into the lives of those who are directing the affairs of today. Worth-while stories of worth-while people. You’ll enjoy them.

And fiction stories, too. *Everybody’s* short stories rank with its serials. Such brilliant writers as these contribute their best work: Achmed Abdullah, William Slavens McNutt, Will Levington Comfort, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Ben Ames Williams, Samuel Merwin, and many others. THE OLD OR THE NEW is another department you’ll like. Here are given, each month, two outstanding stories by master writers, one by a genius of days gone by, the other by a more recent author. H. G. Wells, O. Henry, Edith Wharton, Richard Harding Davis, James B. Connolly, Owen Wister, are but a few of those represented.

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I enclose $2.50 in payment for a full year’s subscription to *Everybody’s* Magazine (twelve big issues). Kindly enter my subscription beginning with the November issue in which Mr. Chambers’ story starts.

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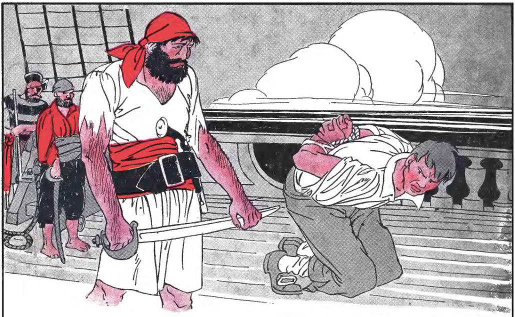

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Fill in your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to us and we will send you without charge, a full-size 50-cent tube—enough for 60 days' shaving. We make this unusual offer because we know that once you have used Lysol Shaving Cream, you will never want to be without it again.

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